Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

Leveraging Ministry and Community Partnerships to Address Community Needs

A Thesis Project Report Submitted to

the Faculty of the Liberty University School of Divinity

in Candidacy for the Degree of

Doctor of Ministry

by

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT
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Liberty University - John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, 2024
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This qualitative DMIN project aims to expand the outreach impact of Strengthen Thy Sister Ministry by continuing to leverage ministry and community organization partnerships to address a specific community need. Strengthen Thy Sister, an ecumenical women's ministry in St. Louis, Missouri, partnered with Jennings School District Hope Houses to provide tangible support to the organization during the COVID-19 pandemic. The partnership helped to address food insecurity among homeless students and families in a crisis. This partnership granted Strengthen Thy Sister an opportunity to partner with certified and experienced educational practitioners with the infrastructure to serve the students at Jennings School District. Developing strategic alliances through coordinated systems provides an avenue to serve under-resourced and marginalized communities with the greatest need while sharing the love of Jesus Christ in word and deed.

The project includes results from data collection, project implementation, participants' pre- and post-questionnaires, pre- and post-focus groups, and project outcomes. These results assisted Strengthen Thy Sister with expanding its outreach ministry model while addressing an immediate crisis within the community through leveraging ministry and community partnerships.

Abstract length: 175 words

Keywords: community engagement, disparities, food insecurity, leverage, para ministry, partnerships, outreach ministry, strategic planning

Dedication

I thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, for the honor and opportunity to serve humanity within the work of the ministry and in the marketplace.

This body of work is dedicated in memory of my parents, Ervin L. Johnson and Pastor Nancy J. Mayfield Ward. I am forever grateful for their love and the tremendous sacrifices they made for me, my siblings, my daughter, and my grandchildren.

Thanks:
Strengthen Thy Sister Board of Directors and Consultants
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Dr. Howard Owens - Mentor
Dr. Paul Esswein – Academic Reader

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Jennings School District Board of Directors
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CONTENTS

Tables

Figures

Abbreviations

CDC   *Center for Disease Control and Prevention*

COVID-19 *Coronavirus Disease*

DMIN   *Doctor of Ministry*

LUSOD *Liberty University School of Divinity*

JSD   *Jennings School District*

STS   *Strengthen Thy Sister*

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Disparities plague marginalized and under-resourced communities throughout the nation. They manifest in different forms such as "social, racial, income and wages, educational, health care, gender, wealth and economic disparities."[1] Wherever a ministry establishes itself within a community creates an opportunity for ministry leaders to partner with community organizations to address the formidable ills that plague communities. These propitious partnerships offer an opportunity to exhibit the love of Christ in word and deed. When individuals choose to love others, they also embody the love of Christ as they serve and share resources to support the needs of others.

The Apostle Paul encourages Christians in Phil 2:4 to consider not only their interests but also the interests of others. In other words, one must be willing to empathize with the needs of others as if they were their own needs. Likewise, Martin Luther King says, "An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity."[2] Living a fulfilled life requires one to be intentional about looking outside of oneself and connecting with others in a broader community to fulfill the two greatest commandments from God. Jesus declared in Matt 22:37-40, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is *the* first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On

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[1] Jose Mandi, "Disparity Definition: A Problem in our Society," Diversity for Social Impact, last modified November 2, 2022, https://diversity.social/disparity-definition.

[2] Martin Luther King, Jr. and Coretta Scott King, *The Words of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York, NY: Newmarket Press, 1987), 3.

these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."[3] Individuals demonstrate the love of Christ to their neighbors by sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ while addressing the community's needs in a strategic, practical, and tangible way. The Greek language defines the word "neighbor" as one near or close by.[4] The greater nearness rests in the closeness of human beings created in God's image and likeness. Therefore, whether someone inhabits St. Louis or Ghana, they are near to others because of their shared humanity. Ultimately, what affects one human affects the other.

Jesus Christ demonstrated His love for humanity through His sacrificial life, death, burial, and resurrection. God sent His only begotten son to offer salvation and eternal life to humanity. While doing so, Jesus Christ navigated the community, fulfilling the needs of those He encountered, and illustrated to others how to replicate the love of Christ. Whether He healed a lame man or a crippled woman, fed five thousand people with one fish and five loaves of bread, or confronted the systems that upheld injustices, Jesus expressed deep concern for the spiritual and social aspects of all human life and instructed the disciples to do the same. The well-being of humanity's spirit, soul, mind, and body rested at the foundation of Jesus Christ's ministry. He sought to bring peace, equality, righteousness, and justice to every aspect of humanity's life (Ps 89:14; Jer 9:24b). To share the gospel and not be concerned with the quality of one's life or how systems affect the quality of one's life, contradicts the entire message of the gospel. Being concerned about every aspect of humanity's life affords ministries an opportunity to labor within the community in nonconventional ways while sharing and exemplifying the

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[3] Matt 22:37-40, New King James Version (NKJV). Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references in this thesis project will be from the New King James Version of the Bible.

[4] Philemon "Phil" Zachariou, "Who Is Really My Neighbor?" GreekLinguistics.net, last modified May 12, 2022, https://greeklinguistics.net/who-is-really-my-neighbor/.

gospel of Jesus Christ. Essentially, people's humanity makes them neighbors and not their geographical space.

Being a neighbor translates into coming alongside someone and helping them live and thrive as human beings. It entails humanity connecting with humanity. Loving one's neighbor begins with seeing beyond oneself and seeking how he or she can love the other. In addition, King writes, "The good neighbor looks beyond external accidents and discerns those inner qualities that make all men human, therefore, brothers."[5] When aspiring to love as Christ loved, one must be willing and intentional about seeing everyone as their neighbor regardless of their race, ethnicity, or social and economic status. While used to categorize and characterize distinct population uniqueness, these social constructs can be detrimental when used to deprive people of the basic resources they need to thrive as a valued and vital part of the community. Thurman writes in Jesus and the Disinherited, "In a memorable story, Jesus defined the neighbor by telling of the Good Samaritan. With sure artistry and great power, He depicted what happens when a man responds directly to human need across the barriers of class, race, and condition."[6] As individuals aim to serve their neighbors, they must view themselves as the other and not allow other differences and conditions to hinder them from loving unconditionally and from giving sacrificially to accommodate the needs of others.

Though neighbors may not profess the same faith or possess the same viewpoints, they are all human beings who share the same basic needs, which comprise being treated with love, respect, kindness, and equality. Matthew Henry says, "We must love our neighbor as ourselves,

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[5] Martin Luther King, Jr. "Martin Luther King, Jr. Quotes About Neighbors," AZ Quotes, Accessed March 15, 2023, https://www.azquotes.com/author/8044-Martin_Luther_King_Jr/tag/neighbor.

[6] Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1976), 79.

as truly and sincerely as we love ourselves, and in the same instances; nay, in many cases, we must deny ourselves for the good of our neighbor and must make ourselves servants to the true welfare of others, and be willing to spend and be spent for them, to lay down our lives for the brethren."[7] In *Where Do We Go from Here: Community or Chaos?* King shares that "all inhabitants of the globe are now neighbors. This worldwide neighborhood has been brought into being largely because of the modern scientific and technological revolutions."[8] Based on these ideas, individuals in this world are considered neighbors and have an obligation to serve and help advance the quality of life for all humanity through the intricate systems that connect them. Therefore, ministries must embrace an outward focus and seek strategies to connect with the greater community to leverage relationships to expand outreach ministry. In the article "Leveraging Your Church's Assets," Pastor Smith discusses how churches can partner with the community to amass income for the church while meeting a community need. Such partnerships involve neighbors conjoining to help build the community. Pastor Smith states, "You must look for new partners because they can bring extra hands, extra people, possibly extra resources. So, when I say leveraging assets, it's not just about the four corners of the building around you or what you own. It's also the people in your church, the people in the community, the organizations you can team with, and other churches."[9] While this form of leveraging applies to individuals securing income for the local church, this concept also applies to ministries

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[7] Matthew Henry, "Matthew 22 Bible Commentary," Matthew Henry Bible Commentary, accessed January 19, 2023, https://www.christianity.com/bible/commentary/matthew-henry-complete/matthew/22.

[8] Martin Luther King Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community*? (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1967), 177.

[9] Jacqueline Jones-Smith and Ann A. Michel, "Leveraging Your Church's Assets," Lewis Center for Church Leadership, last modified January 18, 2022, https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/leveraging-your-churchs-assets/.

expanding outreach to serve the needs of the community. The focus entails leveraging partnerships to showcase the love of Christ through service to the community.

To ascertain how one can love his or her neighbor, one must uncover how to serve his or her neighbor auspiciously. Thus, ministries must be intentional and strategic about engaging and developing relationships with community organizations to provide collective solutions and resources to address and meet community needs. Coordinated and diverse targeted partnerships and systems provide an opportunity for the community to flourish.

Ministry Context

Strengthen Thy Sister Women's Ministry, located in St. Louis, Missouri, established its board of directors in 2010 with a mission focused on "encouraging and empowering women to strengthen themselves while strengthening their families, relationships, and communities."[10] This ecumenical intergenerational fellowship encompasses women from the community, local churches and para ministries, and diverse cultural, social, and economic backgrounds. Strengthen Thy Sister's primary focus involves encouraging and empowering women to strengthen themselves spiritually through an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. Through a series of biblical, relevant, practical, and applicable teachings, women acquire insight that can aid in strengthening themselves while fostering stronger families, relationships, and communities. As women intentionally and progressively strengthen themselves spiritually, the ministry encourages and admonishes them to nurture, mentor, and develop the children and young adults in their lives, to help and seek the counsel and wisdom of their elders. They also are admonished to encourage and honor the men in their lives by seeking ways to strengthen them in their

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[10] "Mission Statement," Strengthen Thy Sister, accessed September 22, 2023, http://www.strengthenthy-sister.org.

respective roles within the family, ministry, marketplace, and community. Additionally, young and adult men have been and continue to be a vital part of STS and assist with forwarding the ministry's mission and vision. The ministry recognizes and honors both men and women yearly during the annual Strengthen Thy Sister Luncheon for their tremendous contribution to the kingdom of God, their families, the marketplace, and the community. This aspect of the ministry focuses on front-line essential servants and workers whose prodigious efforts in the ministry and community are often unsung and not recognized because of their position. These essential persons include but are not limited to restaurant service, childcare workers, plumbers, cashiers, janitors, greeters, secretaries, bus drivers, nurses, schoolteachers, EMT workers, mechanics, laundry mat attendants, and beauticians. All are gifted and possess great qualities and skills that are vital to building strong communities.

Strengthen Thy Sister exercises a holistic approach to strengthening every aspect of individuals' lives by fortifying women spiritually through the Word of God and through biblically aligned materials and resources that enrich the spiritual and practical areas of their lives. These areas include self-care; mental, emotional, and physical health; serving in ministry; family dynamics, healthy balance, and boundaries; purpose-driven professional careers in ministry and the marketplace; work-life balance; personal and professional goal planning; relationship building; financial literacy and wealth building; community engagement and community service that target diverse populations; along with global prayer and outreach. STS's fellowship meetings entail a global and local community component where its participants discuss existent crises from a biblical and worldview perspective. In addition, subject matter experts and practitioners within and outside of the ministry provide information and resources that equip the women of Strengthen Thy Sister in various areas. The ministry recognizes,

celebrates, and employs the gifts, skills, and talents of the women who attend the fellowship and seek to help strengthen one another spiritually, practically, and professionally.

The women of Strengthen Thy Sister fulfill their community, ministry, and professional roles by providing support and resources to the community in several ways. Their efforts include serving on various agency and community boards, steering committees, and advisory councils, advocating for public policies and voting rights. Many spearhead community initiatives in education, mental and health care, the incarceration system, affordable housing, youth programs, and senior services. Their efforts also include volunteering for community service projects for the homeless, veterans, domestic violence survivors, seniors, youth, foster care children, substance abuse programs, physically disabled persons, and health fairs. Overall, the ministry's internal mission drives the external vision for community outreach, which the women of Strengthen Thy Sister help to implement. The ministry believes serving the community equates to putting faith into action. Sharing one's beliefs without putting action to one's word lacks true concern for humanity. Therefore, one must be willing to shoulder a person's need while sharing the love of Christ with them. As James declares in Jas 2:15-16, "Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?" In other words, people must witness what someone believes before the person decides to express his or her beliefs. In addition, Matthew Henry states, "There is no way to show we really believe in Christ, but by being diligent in good works, from gospel motives, and for gospel purposes."[11] Serving others

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[11] Matthew Henry, "James 2 Bible Commentary," Matthew Henry Bible Commentary (Complete), Accessed September 20, 2023, https://www.christianity.com/bible/commentary/matthew-henry-complete/james/2#:~:text=Complete%20Concise,1%2D7.

welcomes the Body of Christ to share the gospel purposefully, aiming to improve humanity's quality of life. Christians have a spiritual and moral responsibility to engage the community, to provide support, and to partner with others to provide collaborative solutions to exigencies both locally and globally.

Strengthen Thy Sister embodies a comprehensive spiritual and practical approach to strengthening every aspect of women's lives while facilitating the fulfillment of specific needs within the community. The ministry conducts quarterly, non-restrictive fellowship gatherings in a community center. The focus rests not solely on a women's ministry but on a ministry that seeks to spiritually strengthen humanity while serving the community holistically. Specifically, Strengthen Thy Sister strategically and intentionally focuses on targeting and serving marginalized and under-resourced communities through partnerships.

As evidenced in the ministry's efforts, any church or para ministry can coact to execute an outreach expansion project. Both churches and para ministries can and should pursue opportunities to partner with each other and community agencies to tackle community needs. Whether exemplified as a bilateral partnership of organizations, a multi-church network, or an informal alliance among like-minded ministries, Christian unity manifests through practical partnering to spread the gospel in word and deed. In Primuth and Kaspar's summary on the Lausanne 2019 Global Workforce forum, "Ministry Partnerships & Networks: Why Collaboration is Critical to the Movement," they state, "As our world is becoming increasingly complex, many challenges will require a collaborative effort for there to be innovative solutions and real, lasting transformation."[12] The Stanford Institute of Social Innovation also emphasizes:

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[12] Kärin Butler Primuth and Michael Kaspar, "Ministry Partnerships & Networks: Why Collaboration is Critical to the Movement," Lausanne Movement, accessed June 19, 2023, https://lausanne.org/content/ministry-part-nerships-networks-collaboration-critical-movement.

"There is no other way society will achieve large-scale progress against urgent and complex problems unless a collective impact approach becomes the accepted way of doing business."[13] This viewpoint applies not only to spreading the gospel but also to addressing the ills of society by leveraging ministry and community partnerships.

The Doctor of DMIN program has assisted Strengthen Thy Sister Ministry in actualizing the Great Commission by coming alongside the universal church to serve community needs. Conducting research about the relationship between the ministry and the community, the DMIN project described in this thesis has also provided an opportunity to present a ministry framework that could be implemented within other para ministries, churches, and community organizations.

As the Bible declares, "For we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance as a way of life" (Eph 2:10). God contrives a specific assignment for each of His children's lives, and they must be intentional about fulfilling that assignment within the Body of Christ and in the marketplace. Both the ministry and professional career of Minister Mayfield, the founder of Strengthen Thy Sister, merged to create an intentional fusion between ministry and the marketplace. Minister Mayfield has intentionally expanded outreach ministry to the community as a licensed and ordained minister with an educational and professional background in Christian ministry and social services. This DMIN project authentically represents Minister Mayfield's ministry and marketplace service to humanity. Biblically, God commissioned skilled and gifted men and women such as Nehemiah, Esther, Daniel, Joseph, Lydia, Priscilla, and Aquila to orchestrate portentous works in the marketplace. As exemplified throughout the Bible, God does not delimit the work of ministry to

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[13] Fay Hanleybrown, John Kania, and Mark Kramer. "Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work," *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 2012, accessed June 15, 2023, https://doi.org/10.48558/2T4M-ZR69.

a denomination, local church, or ministry. Extending the work of the ministry to the marketplace provides an opportunity for the Body of Christ to employ their God-given abilities to serve and to coalesce with the broader community. For instance, the article "Marketplace Ministry" highlights the ministry of "the whole church" and affirms that "lay witness takes place, by women and men, not only through the local church . . . but through friendships, in the home and at work . . . Our first responsibility is to witness to those who are already our friends, relatives, neighbors, and colleagues."[14] The outreach arm of the Strengthen Thy Sister ministry has facilitated the conjoining of ministry and the marketplace, focusing on addressing community needs in a targeted, tangible, and impactful method through collaborative partnerships. Neil Johnson defines the marketplace as "the forum through which human economic commerce is conducted." It includes the business community, the workplace of whatever kind, and "policy-making forums" at local, national, and international levels that impact the economy and those working within it. Johnson describes the marketplace as "perhaps the only institution that touches, directly or indirectly, virtually every person on planet earth. In one way or another, it is a pervasive part of every society, culture, and people group. It is found in the midst of every religion and every political system in every historic era."[15] Pursuing a professional career in the marketplace enables Christians and ministries to implant the gospel in every sector of the marketplace, such as politics, law, government, health care, education, arts, science, technology, financial institutions, not-for-profits, and the judicial system etc. Each sector presents an opportunity to serve humanity's needs while sharing Christ's love in word and deed.

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[14] "Marketplace Ministry," Lausanne Occasional Paper, no. 40, pg. 14.

[15] Ibid., 7.

Serving the community through partnerships stands as a critical pillar of Strengthen Thy Sister. By forming strategic alliances with other community organizations, they assist disadvantaged communities through coordinated systems and spread the love of Jesus Christ through their endeavors. Thus, building relationships through partnerships continues to be an intricate part of STS's outreach ministry to the community. The ministry also seeks avenues to strengthen current relationships to expand service to the community, which serves as its neighbor. In the book *Connecting to Change*, the authors admonish leaders to pursue relationships with people within and outside of the church who will expand ministry to the community through partnerships. They state, "Leaders must intentionally start new relationships and deepen existing relationships every opportunity they have. Not only is it the right thing to do, but also it is one of the essential ways in which we practice following and growing closer to Jesus. It is a spiritual discipline to see Jesus in the people we encounter and to love them as Jesus loves them."[16] When individuals recognize everyone as their neighbor and learn to love them as Christ does, this practice creates opportunities to foster new relationships and strengthen current ones. Demonstrating the love of Christ through targeted community outreach compels churches and ministries to expand existing relationships with each other and to establish new relationships with a strategic focus to address specific needs within the community. In addition, partnering to spread the gospel in word and deed within communities showcases unity within the Body of Christ.

Adequately addressing community needs entails developing partnerships and engaging and analyzing the demographics and ethnographics of the community an outreach ministry supports. In this study, the research and data focus on St. Louis County. According to the 2019

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[16] Joseph W. Daniels and Christie Latona, *Connecting for a Change: How to Engage People, Churches, and Partners to Inspire Hope in Your Community* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2019). accessed June 17, 2023.

National Government Census, St. Louis County's population totals over one million. Sixty-seven percent of the population was white, twenty-five percent was African American, and three percent was Hispanic. The median household income was seventy-two thousand.[17] Many residents in St. Louis County experience food insecurity and live within communities considered food deserts, including Jennings municipality. Based on the most recent data from Feeding America, 109,030 people living in St. Louis County are facing food insecurity, and 24,940 are children. With this data being collected pre-pandemic, the possibility exists that even more people are struggling to survive because of COVID-19, many for the first time.

For the eleventh consecutive year, Feeding America conducted its annual *Map the Meal Gap* study to enrich individuals' understanding of food insecurity and food costs at the local level. The study featured data from 2020. In response to COVID-19, Feeding America also released a companion study and interactive map that illustrated the projected impact of the pandemic on local food insecurity in 2020 and 2021.[18] To better assess the current and future state of local food insecurity, individuals must understand historical variations prior to the pandemic. Only then can organizations formulate effective strategies to reach people at risk of hunger.

Over the past thirteen years, Strengthen Thy Sister women's ministry has consistently and strategically partnered with organizations and agencies to help address community exigencies in St. Louis, Missouri. Yearly, the Strengthen Thy Sister board of directors revisits

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[17] "Quick Facts St. Louis County, Missouri," United States Census Bureau, accessed November 19, 2022, https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/stlouiscountymissouri/.

[18] "Food Insecurity Among Overall (All Ages) Population in St. Louis City County Before COVID-19," Feeding America, accessed March 15, 2023, https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2018/overall/missouri/county/st-louis-city/.

the ministry's mission and vision to ensure the ministry's work maintains an outward focus toward the community while providing biblically aligned spiritual guidance. The ministry targets marginalized areas with concentrated poverty, digital divides, economic distress, food deserts, food insecurities, health disparities, limited resources, and racial disparities. Previous Strengthen Thy Sister outreach ministry to the community has been comprised of providing transportation and meals for children and families of incarcerated individuals, reentry programs for women, donations to food pantries, all-girl academic school and programs, homeless shelters, youth agencies, senior living programs, annual back to school projects, and international missions. Strengthen Thy Sister expanded its outreach to global missions by financially supporting a school in Ghana through a partnership with a mission para ministry that travels to Ghana frequently. To achieve such efforts, Strengthen Thy Sister believes in partnering strategically with established agencies and trained practitioners who employ coordinated systems to address community needs. Though churches and para ministries may explore how both entities can collaborate, sometimes they will operate separately to fulfill specific outreach efforts within the community based on their outreach vision to the community. Kelebogile says, "Parachurch organizations work outside and across denominations and seek to come alongside the church and specialize in activities that individual churches may not be able to specialize in by themselves. They often cross-denominational, national, and international boundaries by providing specialized services and training."[19] In order to fulfill community outreach goals, each ministry must venture outside of their typical parameters to serve thy neighbor.

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[19] Kelebogile Resane, "The Church and the Parachurch: Can the Two Dialogue in Order to Agree?" *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 41. 10.4102/vet. v41i1.2099.

Problem Presented

Globally and locally, a wealth of disparities affects the well-being of marginalized people within a community. Various dimensions of disparities exist in areas such as economics, education, health care, age, and racial inequality. When unheeded, these disparities lead to poverty, income gaps, economic inequity, food deserts, food insecurity, homelessness, income gaps, and limited affordable housing.[20] The problem, therefore, that must be addressed is community needs such as those consistent with the mandates of Scripture.

Christians are obligated to serve and witness Jesus Christ in word and deed throughout the community. Thus, confronting community disparities necessitates intentional and strategic collaborative partnerships that address the needs of humanity regardless of race, culture, gender, or social and economic status. For instance, Jesus illustrated his intentionality about engaging and addressing the needs within society consistently throughout His life and His service to humanity. Christ loved the world, and regardless of people's ethnicity or social and economic status, He loved all unconditionally.

Deeply concerned about humanity's well-being, Jesus recognized spiritual and practical community needs and responded to those needs with compassion, empathy, and wisdom. Sensing says, "When you listen to the concerns of the community, some issues will emerge as immediate and rise in priority. Problems that are communally discerned and mutually agreed upon will garner support and enthusiasm."[21] In St. Louis, Missouri, Strengthen Thy Sister

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[20] Michele Ver Ploeg, David Nulph, and Ryan Williams, "Mapping Food Deserts in the United States," USDA Economic Research Service, last modified December 1, 2011, https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2011/december/data-feature-mapping-food-deserts-in-the-us/.

[21] Tim Sensing. *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 15.

ecumenical women's ministry expanded its ministry outreach to continue addressing community needs based on the existing crisis the COVID-19 pandemic magnified. As a part of the ministry's current framework, its leaders examined the data that showcased how the pandemic impacted the surrounding community and decided to counter its effects proactively, thus allowing the DMIN project to be developed and implemented within the current ministry context. Since the ministry inception, Strengthen Thy Sister has advocated for others within the community. Paul wrote in Phil 2:3-4, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interest but also to the interest of others." With confronting the ills of the community being an intricate part of Jesus Christ's ministry, the universal church must forward this ministry to mitigate community disparities. This can be accomplished through local churches and para ministries with an outreach arm that engages individuals and organizations within the community that is equipped with the necessary experience, resources, infrastructure, and partnerships to address community needs.

Purpose Statement

The purpose, therefore, of this DMIN action research project is to expand the ministry impact of Strengthen Thy Sister by leveraging ministry and community organization partnerships to continue addressing community needs. Strengthen Thy Sister ministry partners and project participants established a partnership with Jennings School District Hope House to confront the food insecurity and food desert crisis that affected the JSD students prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose and goal of Jennings School District Hope House is to assist students facing a crisis with maintaining stability while acquiring an education. Hope House serves students and families facing crises such as alcoholism, child abuse, domestic violence, drug abuse, eviction, homelessness, an incarcerated parent, mental illness, and those who could

potentially be placed in foster care because of crises that could threaten the students' well-being or cause the students to be misplaced.

The mission of Jennings School District is to "ensure each student develops a passion for learning through challenging curricula, rigorous academic standards, innovative, stimulating educational environments, and a passion that education is a lifelong pursuit."[22]

Communities across the nation experienced the effects of COVID-19, and over one million people died during the crisis.[23] The COVID-19 pandemic magnified significant problems that plagued communities prior to the pandemic and necessitated the provision of immediate resources in some of the most marginalized and under-resourced communities. In fact, the pandemic impacted St. Louis North County immensely in specific zip codes because of factors such as poverty, health disparities, lack of access to healthcare services, and delayed distribution of current and accurate information. During the initial outbreak of the virus, there was also a lack of vital resources, such as healthcare, personal protective equipment, sufficient testing kits, vaccines, and internet access. Having access to vital resources prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic could have combated the spread of the virus and minimized deaths in many communities.

Strengthen Thy Sister helped abate food insecurity among Jennings School District students by contributing groceries to Hope House 1 & 2 for three consecutive months. This contribution also helped offset the monthly budget to allocate funds to other needs within the homes (Appendix K). In addition, this partnership allowed Strengthen Thy Sister to exhibit the

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[22] Jennings School District, "Mission," accessed January 17, 2022, https://www.jenningsk12.org/aboutjsd.

[23] Doug Donovan, "U.S. Officially Surpasses One Million COVID-19 Deaths," Johns Hopkins University HUB, last modified May 17, 2022, https://hub.jhu.edu/2022/05/17/one-million-covid-19-deaths/.

love of Jesus Christ to the community in a practical and tangible manner by addressing a specific need within the community. Therefore, this project aligns with Strengthen Thy Sister's mission and vision to encourage and empower women to strengthen themselves while strengthening their families, relationships, and communities. Ministries worldwide operate in geographical areas with community needs, which provides an opportunity to cultivate strategic partnerships with skilled practitioners who possess insight on such needs. Skjegstad says, "The best community ministry acknowledges the giftedness within the community and work together to implement solutions instead of simply observing the problem."[24] Acknowledging and partnering with skilled and gifted practitioners with established credibility in the community serves as a fundamental aspect of outreach ministry. Based on the information the Jennings School District administration provided, the outreach expansion project allowed Strengthen Thy Sister to focus on Hope House 1 & 2 to address an explicit need among homeless students and families facing a crisis.

Dr. Tiffany Anderson, the visionary of Hope House, served as the superintendent of Jennings School District for over six years and has been an exceptional, forward-thinking public educator for over thirty years. Dr. Anderson stated that she "imagines a community willing to donate food, toiletries, services, and other necessities to the children who live in it."[25] Her vision for Jennings School District included providing support to homeless students and students in crisis to help them remain in the school district where they resided. In her interview with

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[24] Joy Skjegstad, *7 Creative Models to Community Ministry* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2013), 9.

[25] Nancy Cambria and J. B. Forbes, "Jennings School District Readies to Open Its Own Foster Home for Homeless Students," *STLToday.com*, November 10, 2015, https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/education/jennings-school-district-readies-to-open-its-own-foster-home-for-homeless-students/article_f2f756b6-abc5-5681-9ef3-c79c7ca9e444.html.

National Public Radio (NPR), Dr. Anderson commented, "We all have the ability to make schools feel like home. With people there that love them, care for them, and will literally do anything to make sure they are successful."[26] Dr. Anderson assessed the data and needs of the students and implemented a groundbreaking program that fomented stability for the students and families of Jennings School District, who faced a myriad of crises. Thus, the Hope House homes furnished a stable environment with several support services that addressed the residents' specific needs. Dr. Anderson explained, "Many district families struggle with issues such as substance abuse, temporary incarceration, mental illness, and the frequent threat of eviction. Sometimes relatives cannot step up for the kids at these times".[27] Dr. Art McCoy, who succeeded Dr. Anderson as superintendent and continued building a solid foundation for Hope House families and students, stated, "We provide therapy and counseling in each of our hope houses regularly, we provide enrichment, and we provide mentoring and coaching. It's the greatest thing that the community can provide and that's love and support engagement in their lives, consistency, safety, and it's just love in action."[28]

Likewise, the current superintendent, Dr. Paula Knight, and the superintendent of secondary education, Dr. Hicks-Prophet, and their staff continue to work diligently to provide the students of JSD with the support and care they need to excel academically while meeting their immediate needs. Jennings Hope House is a community program supported by a variety of partnerships within the community that demonstrate love through acts of kindness. The Jennings

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[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Brittney Verner, "Jennings School District Provides Homes for Youth in Need," 5 On Your Side, December 15, 2018, https://www.ksdk.com/article/news/local/jennings-school-district-provides-homes-for-youth-in-need/63-8c3d45e4-c83b-41b6-aae8-b9c2223322d9.

School District's outstanding wrap-around support services showcase the significance of ongoing support that grants students and families services like two full-service health centers on-site, professional therapy and counseling, a food bank, washers and dryers in each school, and homeless liaisons who serve within the school district to accommodate homeless students' needs. Overall, the school district has implemented an innovative approach to supporting the needs of the students and continues to develop partnerships, programs, and services as the students' needs evolve.

The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) designated St. Louis, Missouri as a Promise Zone in 2015, and Jennings municipality operates as part of the North County Promise Zone. By definition, "Promise Zones are high poverty communities where the federal government partners with local leaders to increase economic activity, improve educational opportunities, leverage private investment, reduce violent crime, enhance public health and address other priorities identified by the community."[29] Jennings municipality comprises a population of over 14,000 residents, with only two major grocery stores within the community located several miles away from the residents' homes, which, according to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), classifies this area as a food desert and causes families to encounter health issues and food insecurity. As stated on the Feeding America website, food insecurity is defined as a "lack of consistent access to enough food for every person in a household to live an active, healthy life."[30] According to the USDA, over 38 million people, including 12 million children, in the United States are food insecure. The COVID-19

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[29] "Promise Zones Overview," HUD Exchange, accessed September 14, 2022, https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/promise-zones/promise-zones-overview/.

[30] "Hunger and Food Insecurity," Feeding America. accessed March 14, 2022, https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/food-insecurity/.

pandemic has increased food insecurity among families with children and communities of color, who already faced hunger at much higher rates before the pandemic.[31] To help address food insecurity in St. Louis County's District 4, the St. Louis County Government allocated millions of dollars from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). These funds will help organizations to effectuate a plan and provide services to tackle food insecurity and the lack of grocery stores in identified neighborhoods.

During the 2021-2022 school year, Jennings' student enrollment totaled 2,498, of which 290, or 11%, were considered homeless, and 100% of the students were enrolled in the free lunch program. Despite the Jennings municipality being considered a food desert and multiple JSD families and students facing food insecurities, the school district continued thriving. For the first time since Missouri's student performance-based accreditation, the Jennings School District made history by earning a 90.2% on the Missouri Annual Performance Report (APR) during the 2018 school year, which ranks within the accredited with distinction range. During the 2018-19 school year, the Jennings School District was selected as one of three national recipients of the National School Boards Association's (NSBA) 2018 CUBE Annual Award for Urban School Board Excellence by the National School Boards Association (NSBA) Council of Urban Boards of Education (CUBE) because of their hard work and commitment to students. Jennings is the first school district in the state of Missouri to receive this award in the fourteen-year history of the NSBA award. To qualify for this award, schools must demonstrate excellence in four key areas: school board performance, academic improvement, educational equity, and community

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[31] "Food Insecurity in the US Key Statistics & Graphics," USDA Economic Research Service, accessed March 14, 2022, https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/key-statistics-graphics/.

engagement. Jennings School District also achieved a 96% graduation rate in the 2020-2021

school year.[32]

Basic Assumptions

The Body of Christ is equipped with diverse callings and gifts to glorify God and to serve

humanity regardless of individuals' economic status, social status, or ethnicity. When ministry

leadership conjoins with community and local organizations to build and support coordinated

systems, community needs can be addressed in a targeted, systematic, tangible, impactful, and

sustainable manner.

Definitions

The following terms are fundamental to understanding the scope of the DMIN project.

They not only provide context for the project but also further its application.

Church: The translation of the Greek term Ekklesia is used in the New Testament to identify the church as a community of believers in Jesus Christ. It is a called-out assembly or congregation. The church is what Hooker called politic society. It can relate to the wider society in which it is embedded (Snyder, 168).

Community Engagement: Community engagement is the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those people.

Disparity: A disparity is a noticeable and usually significant difference or dissimilarity in areas such as economic, educational, racial, and health conditions.

Food Desert: A food desert is an area that has limited access to affordable and nutritious food, in contrast with an area with higher access to supermarkets or vegetable shops with fresh foods within a one-mile radius.

Food Insecurity: The USDA defines food insecurity as a lack of consistent access to sufficient nutritious, affordable food for every household member to live an active, healthy life.

Homeless Students: Homeless students are children and unaccompanied youth who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.

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[32] "Districts, Charters, & Schools," Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, accessed January 19, 2022. https://apps.dese.mo.gov/MCDS/Home.aspx.

Leverage: Leverage is to use possession to its maximum advantage to achieve better or new outcomes.

Outreach Ministry: Outreach ministry is the practice of individuals looking beyond themselves to the people around them and sharing the gospel and love of Christ as they serve and connect with the community and world at large.

Para Ministry: A para ministry is a combination of Christian, faith-based organizations that come alongside the local church and work outside and across denominations to engage in social welfare and evangelism in the community and world at large.

Partnership: A partnership is an arrangement where parties agree to cooperate to advance their mutual interest for the betterment of the community.

Strategic Planning: Strategic planning is the process of defining an organization's strategy or direction and allocating resources to pursue this strategy.

Limitations

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) enacted COVID-19 public gathering protocols to minimize the spread of the COVID-19 virus. This prevented the project participants from meeting in person; however, this limitation did not impede the implementation of the project or affect the validity and effectiveness of the project. The Strengthen Thy Sister board of directors canceled all in-person meetings and transitioned to virtual meetings expeditiously to align with the CDC public gathering protocols and to protect the safety of the participants. Although the participants could not meet in person, these limitations did not affect the project implementation, virtual meetings, completion and submission of the pre and post-questionnaires, contribution of resources, and project outcomes. The second limitation resulted from the project focusing on the specific geographical area of Jennings municipality, particularly the students within the Jennings School District who were facing food insecurity before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The project strategically executed ministry outreach through a community partnership with Jennings School District Hope Houses.

Delimitations

This DMIN research project was delimited to the Strengthen Thy Sister outreach ministry, a not-for-profit organization within St. Louis North County, and did not emphasize every ministry in the St. Louis North County area. The delimitation resulted from the DMIN project criteria that required the study to be conducted within a current ministry setting, in a specific location, while expanding the ministry outreach component to address a specific exigency.

Thesis Statement

When ministries, whether it be local churches or para ministries, partner with the community through local organizations and government to build coordinated systems and contribute resources, such partnerships allow community needs to be addressed in an informed, systematic, targeted, and impactful manner. Community organizations and local governments alleviate some community disparities through collaboration, coordinated systems, and funding opportunities. Federal and provincial governments should consistently revisit existing policies and develop new policies that directly impact community disparities by creating programs to fulfill the community's needs. Historically, ministries have engaged the community to mitigate its problems and social ills. However, ministries cannot address community problems and disparities alone. Targeting community disparities requires an intentional, strategic effort by allowing local churches, para ministries, and organizations to collaborate through strategically coordinated systems.

Having an outward-focused outreach ministry incorporates creating a new action reformation that is demonstrated by our behavior toward the broader community. Some ministries focus solely on what they do not believe concerning the community and rarely aim to serve the needs of the community. In addition, some individuals form pretentious groups that rally against issues that are not biblically correct and often express hatred and disdain for certain

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people rather than the love of Christ for all people. Rick Warren proposes a solution for such

misdirection and defines this healthy church shift in the following manner:

> The "New Reformation" is not about creeds; it's about deeds. It's not about belief; it's about behavior. We figured out the correct beliefs 500 years ago. We've got our doctrinal beliefs. Here's what the Bible says. Sola Scriptura, Sola Fide, Soli Deo Gloria. But now we need a reformation of behavior. What does the church do in the world? Christians are known today only for what they're against. We've had the feet and the hands of the body of Christ amputated and we're just a big mouth. And we're just known for what we're against.[33]

Christ came to pursue and save the lost, and He demonstrated His love toward humanity

while humans were still living in their sins, not because they were living and believing

righteously. As a panacea for the current state of the world, the Body of Christ must be

recognized by what it believes regarding how it advocates for and loves its neighbors.

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[33] Richard Abanes, *Rick Warren, and the Purpose that Drives Him* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2005), 25.

CHAPTER 2

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter will examine scholarly literature regarding ministry and community

partnerships to address community needs. The information presented will provide the theological

and theoretical foundations for expanding ministry outreach to address community needs and for

leveraging ministry and community organization partnerships to fulfill such needs. In addition,

this research and study will reveal gaps in the existing literature and will provide an opportunity

to design and to implement strategies to tackle community needs effectively. The following

themes materialized from the research and will be discussed in the Literature Review: Ministry

and Community Partnership, Community Engagement, Strategic Planning, Local Church and

Para Ministry, Food Insecurity, Food Desert, and Homeless Students K-12.

Literature Review

This literature review will include an overview of previously published works regarding

Ministry and Community Partnerships. It will also emphasize the focus of Strengthen Thy

Sister's outreach ministry expansion project, which assisted with mitigating food insecurity

among Jennings School District students.

Ministry and Community Partnerships

Ministries coacting with community partners who share similar ideologies toward

advancing the community can provide a greater opportunity for impact in the community. If

ministries do not possess the resources, infrastructure, or experience to address a particular need

within the community, then they must develop partnerships that will produce opportunities to

coalesce and serve for the greater good of the community. Such partnerships offer ministries the

possibility of viewing the community from a broader lens and from the perspective of those who are equipped and experienced to confront the ills and disparities the community faces.

So often ministries focus only on reciting what they believe about their neighbor and community without demonstrating what they believe about them. Jesus posed the question of who a neighbor is to challenge others to become more mindful of those around them who needed help. In F.B. Meyer's commentary on loving thy neighbor, he mentions the question is not, "Who will 'neighbor' you? but, Whom will you 'neighbor?' You ought to ask, who wants my help?"[34] Asking who desires help showcases an intentionality about walking alongside someone to fulfill a need as if it were one's own.

Wherever a ministry is located geographically, whether it be a local church assembly or a para ministry, the vision and mission of the ministry should incorporate a consistent outreach community engagement component that seeks partnerships to assist the needs of the community. Today, leaders must ensure their ministry efforts align with the social aspect of the gospel. Though ministry methods may change, the message and the mission of the gospel will never change. Thus, ministry leaders must be mindful of their message and mission to establish models of ministry that reflect their faith and the community they serve. Jared Wilson, the author of *The Prodigal Church*, states, "We must be very careful that our modes and models of church are sincere attempts to contextualize our common faith to our particular mission fields and communities."[35] Wilson's statement reminds ministries that the focus must remain on the specific needs of the mission field and the communities in which it has been called to evangelize.

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[34] F. B. Meyer, "F. B. Meyer's 'Through the Bible' Commentary: Luke 10," accessed March 1, 2023, https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/fbm/luke-10.html.

[35] Jared Wilson, *The Prodigal Church: A Gentle Manifesto against the Status Quo* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 19.

Moreover, knowing the context of a mission produces clarity and direction. Aubrey Malphurs, the author of *Strategic Planning*, says, "The development of an effective, biblical mission should be the goal of every church leader."[36] Developing an effectual biblical mission allows leaders to construct a viable vision, which gives direction to the mission. Accordingly, Malphurs asserts, "The mission is important because it defines the ministry function, focuses the ministry future, guides decision making, inspires ministry unity, shapes strategy, enhances ministry effectiveness, ensures an enduring organization, and facilitates evaluation."[37] Jesus also taught that Christians must show the love of Christ to any human being who crosses their paths. Caleb C. Afulike states, "Jesus shows that the good news of the Kingdom belongs to the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame."[38] In essence, Afulike implies that Jesus materialized to confer the good news to those in need spiritually and physically. This intention exemplifies love being demonstrated in word and deed, and Jesus illustrated that love toward the rejected, vulnerable, and marginalized within the community.

Ministry leadership must be strategic about addressing and undertaking the community's diverse needs while cultivating disciples. As churches and para ministries strategically contrive their outreach ministry plan, they must consider how to conduct outreach effectively and how to partner with distinct community organizations and social services agencies advantageously. In her article "Social Connectedness," Gallet contends,

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[36] Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: A 21st-Century Model for Church and Ministry Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 105.

[37] Ibid., 108-109.

[38] Caleb C. Afulike, "Luke's Portrayal of the Social Dimension in the Ministry of Jesus and the Apostles (Luke-Acts) According to Isaiah's Message of Social Justice in Chapters 61:1–2 and 58:6," *Journal of Religious & Theological Information*, 17:2, 41-54, DOI: 10.1080/10477845.2017.1369765e. 2018, 9.

Churches have had a traditional role in building a sense of belonging where people feel valued and can develop trusting relationships, often referred to as social capital. The local church is a place where people can connect with others as well as receive assistance, warmth, and kindness, particularly during times of distress . . . A key strength of churches lies in their connections to local communities and their ability to mobilize and utilize local resources, including volunteers, thereby creating civic engagement as well as support networks. The role of churches in building community, developing social capital, and acting to empower individuals stems from a Christian theological worldview and in particular a desire to reflect the presence of God in the world.[39]

While social services organizations aim to remedy the ills that countless individuals and families face within the community, they should not bear this responsibility alone. Ministries comprise people who live both within and outside of their communities. Therefore, ministry leaders can adjoin with professionals within their ministry who serve in the marketplace in areas such as government, social services, professional counseling, education, legal services, health care, accounting, economic development, and politics. Through these alliances, contributors can develop outreach teams to connect the ministry to the larger community through coordinated partnerships. The goal encompasses connecting and partnering with organizations that can assist with addressing the needs of the community while alleviating the burden of an independent effort.

Collaborating to impact and transform communities stands as a critical component of fulfilling the work of the kingdom of God. With ministries sometimes experiencing limitations in their abilities and resources, they must conjoin with the broader community and pertinent organizations to combat prevalent issues within the community. The authors of the Lausanne Occasional Paper article "Towards the Transformation of Our Cities/Region" contend that "collaboration in the transformation of cities is critical. Many urban issues are beyond the

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[39] Wilma Gallet, "Social Connectedness: The Role of the Local Church in Building Community," *Pointers* 26. 1-2, (2016).

capacity of any one local church or urban agency. If we are to see cities transformed, we will

need to work closely with churches, mission agencies, city leaders, social services, and

government authorities."[40] Based on this belief, the partnerships between ministries and

community organizations can be effectual without compromising the guiding principles and

precepts that govern each entity. As organizations and ministries construct the framework for

their partnerships, both entities must be clear about the purpose and role of each entity and,

therefore, enforce corresponding boundaries. Furthermore, the partnership should be executed

with decency and order, respecting the specific principles of each entity. Failing to approach a

partnership with mutual respect and consideration for each partner's guiding principles and core

convictions could impede the development of an efficient framework for the partnership. In

addition, the Lausanne Occasional Paper article mentions there can be "unity without

uniformity" to one's individual belief.[41] The author states, "A major challenge for those seeking

to collaborate is how to hold on to their distinctives, whether in approach, ministry, or theology,

while humbly working for Kingdom transformation with those who don't share their perspective.

We understand that this humility is not an abdication of our evangelical convictions but a respect

for those who bring needed resources and assets."[42]

Community Engagement

Being intentional about connecting with the community where a ministry dwells and

addressing the needs of those the ministry is called to serve functions as a critical component of

fulfilling the mission and purpose of the ministry. Organizations that can equip ministries with

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[40] Lausanne Occasional Paper: "Towards the Transformation of Our Cities/Regions," Lausanne Occasional Paper, no. 37, pg. 39.

[41] Ibid., 40.

[42] Ibid., 40.

specific information regarding a particular area of outreach within a community through partnerships typically operate within the community. For example, the Clark-Fox Family Foundation composes multiple interactive regional ecosystem resource maps for the St. Louis region. These interactive maps help individuals pinpoint the proper resources for a particular need, such as Child Well-Being, Workforce Development, Criminal Justice, Homelessness, and Immigration and Refugee.[43] Though these maps connect individuals to resources within the community, they can also be utilized to connect ministries with agencies that target a particular population, thereby effectuating outreach opportunities. Engaging the community where one serves begins with a clear understanding of why the ministry exists in the context of the community. It also encompasses seeking opportunities to provide support before and during crises by conjoining with and patronizing organizations that are prepared to administer direct services to the community. Thus, the local church or ministry can adopt the following ideology to make their presence known: "Let your community know who you are and what you do."[44] Andy Stanley asks, "If your church suddenly ceased to exist, would our community miss us? If so, why? What value do we bring to our community? How do people outside our church view our church?"[45] These are critical questions ministries must address, and be honest about how connected they are to the community, particularly when it comes to the ills and the social services component of the community. Ministry leadership must be willing to engage in their communities' social justice and social service aspects to help address community exigencies.

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[43] "Mapping," Clark Fox Family Foundation, accessed April 19, 2022, https://clarkfoxstl.com/mapping/.

[44] "A Strategic Approach to God's Plan for Outreach," Outreach, accessed May 14, 2022, https://www.outreach.com/print/article.aspx?article_name=a-strategicapproach.

[45] Andy Stanley, *Deep & Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend* (Zondervan, 2016), 304.

Henry and Richard Blackaby, the authors of *Spiritual Leadership*, state, "Effective leadership has become the panacea for every challenge society faces. Whether politics, religion, business, or law, the universally expressed need is for leaders who will meet the challenges confronting today's organization."[46]

Generally, engagement is not driven by a "model" so much as by a framework of guiding principles, strategies, and approaches. This framework adheres to principles that respect the rights of all community members to be informed, consulted, involved, and empowered. The article "What is Community Engagement?" details how effective community engagement involves the use of multiple tools and strategies and the importance of trust in establishing continuous engagement and efficacious execution.[47] Community engagement aims to incorporate all parties to establish trust and to ascertain solutions collectively. Once ministries select an outreach project or area of need, extensive research should be conducted to govern exigencies in an informed and effective manner.[48] This process should include partnering with subject experts in the community who have access to information that can inform the ministry's area of focus.

Ministries and communities collaborating with a common goal of improving individuals' lives showcase uniformity directed toward a collective impact. This feat requires collective, strategic community engagement in a targeted area of focus. Thus, serving together to meet the needs of others functions as a requisite for collaborative collective impact. Skjegstad describes community engagement as:

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[46] Henry and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 2011).

[47] "What Is Community Engagement?" Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences, Department of Agricultural Economics, Sociology, and Education, accessed September 13, 2021, https://aese.psu.edu/research/centers/cecd/engagement-toolbox/engagement/what-is-community-engagement/.

[48] Joy Skjegstad, *7 Creative Models to Community Ministry* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2013).

the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those people. It operates as a powerful vehicle for facilitating environmental and behavioral changes that will improve the health of a community and its members. It often involves partnerships and coalitions that help mobilize resources and influence systems, change relationships among partners, and serve as catalysts for changing policies, programs, and practices.[49]

Throughout the scriptures, the Body of Christ was not only concerned about spreading the gospel but also serious about engaging the community by meeting the needs of the people, as exemplified by the disciples' concern for the widows in Acts 6:1-7. When Jesus finished preaching, the disciples desired to send the people away to get something to eat, but Jesus instructed the disciples to feed them (Matt 15:32). Matthew Henry states that to send them away "would be a discredit to Christ and his family and a discouragement both to them and to others."[50] Likewise, ignoring one's neighbor as the Levite and priest did in Luke 10:31-32 discredits one's witnessing about Christ and breeds discouragement in those observing a Christian response to a human need.

Strategic Planning

Malphurs defines strategy as "the process that determines how your ministry will accomplish its mission. Navigator-leaders who think strategically look forward. They begin with their mission and vision because both articulate and paint the picture of where the ministry should go."[51] Strategy gives direction to how the mission will be achieved, and without it, the ministry has no aim. Thus, ministry leadership must be strategic in assessing community needs to

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[49] Ibid.,

[50] Matthew Henry, "Matthew 15 Bible Commentary", Christianity.com, accessed September 6, 2023, https://www.christianity.com/bible/commentary/matthew-henry-complete/matthew/15.

[51] Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: A 21st-Century Model for Church and Ministry Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 105.

assist with addressing the needs of the community. Additionally, an internal and external focus must be present to ensure the ministry fulfills the mission of the ministry while aligning the mission with a targeted need in the community. For example, Jesus walked amongst the people and was intentional about quelling the disparities in society. He moved about in a highly strategic and systematic way to fulfill the will of God. Malphurs says, "The strategy is the thread that runs through the church's ministry, tying them together and giving them meaning."[52] Therefore, every aspect of the ministry must be aligned with the mission when executing the strategy.

A fundamental element of strategic planning and ministry outreach involves scouting the land/community, as Nehemiah did to rebuild Jerusalem's walls. Nehemiah had a plan for rebuilding the walls around Jerusalem, and he was quite strategic in how he implemented the plan and process. He explained in Neh 2:11-16,

> I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days I set out during the night with a few others. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on. By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire. Then I moved on toward the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was not enough room for my mount to get through; so, I went up the valley by night, examining the wall. Finally, I turned back and reentered through the Valley Gate. The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work.

Once Nehemiah strategically surveyed the walls, he implemented a plan to rebuild them. Similarly, ministry leadership must interpret the community as a place with broken walls called disparities that can be rectified in a collaborative, coordinated, and sustainable process. Accessing the facts of the geographical area where a church or ministry is located is imperative to addressing the needs of the community and devising strategic and targeted plans. As

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[52] Ibid., 169.

mentioned in "Nehemiah Commentary," "It is utter folly to refuse to believe that things are as bad as they really are. It is vital in any undertaking for God to know the worst, for whenever there is to be a wonderful movement of the Holy Spirit, it begins with someone like Nehemiah, who was bold enough to look at facts, to diagnose them, and then to rise to the task (Redpath)."[53] Thus, the church or para ministries must operate as more than a place of worship, fellowship, and prayer. It must advocate for justice, equity, and equality for humanity, which can begin by confronting disparities within the community. Stanley reminds the local church of their responsibility to shape how the community perceives the church by the way it serves and connects with the community. He states, "It's the churches' responsibility to shape the way people view the local church within the community. We can't leave this to chance."[54] When the church intentionally addresses the community's needs, the community will spread the word. In fact, word of mouth functions as one of the best marketing strategies for any ministry. As Jesus served the needs of the community and confronted systems that oppressed people, the word spread expeditiously even when Jesus asked people not to speak about it. When Jesus healed the man of leprosy, Jesus ordered the man not to tell anyone, but the good news about the man being healed spread to others. Luke commented, "Yet the news about him spread all the more so that the crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sickness" (Luke 5:15, NIV). As evidenced in Luke, the word will spread freely when individuals aim to do good by demonstrating the gospel to others in word and deed within their community.

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[53] Enduring Word, "Nehemiah Commentary," accessed September 6, 2023, https://enduringword.com/bible-comment/nehemiah-2/.

[54] Andy Stanley, *Deep & Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend* (Zondervan, 2016), 304.

Local Church and Parachurch Ministries

The local church assembly and parachurch ministries are united through their common belief in Jesus Christ, and both entities collaborating will produce a greater impact when addressing community needs through partnerships. With a focus on sharing common beliefs, the universal church is not confined to a specific building, denomination, or institution. The universal church comprises men, women, youth, and children who believe in Jesus Christ's death, burial, resurrection, and His plan of salvation and eternal life. They are to perceive the world as a place to demonstrate the love of Christ in word and deed. For example, "*Ekklesia* (or *ecclesia*) is the Greek word translated in the New Testament as 'church.' It comes from ek, meaning 'out from and to' and kaleo, meaning 'to call,' and has to do with a group of people called out from one place and to another. It is an assembly or a congregation. The ekklesia in the New Testament is a group of people who have been called out of the world and to God; it is the church."[55] For this reason, para ministries and local churches can and should coact to fulfill the Great Commission and to meet the needs of the community. Because geographical location and resources can sometimes limit the local churches' outreach to the community, parachurch ministries can assist local churches with global visions in extending their reach.[56] Para ministries can also serve the local church by partnering together to provide united resources for greater impact in the community, along with partnering with community organizations that have the experience and infrastructure necessary to implement the outreach ministry. One primary and critical focus of the local church and para ministries should entail serving the community

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[55] Compelling Truth, "What is the Definition of Ekklesia?" accessed April 14, 2021, https://www.compellingtruth.org/definition-ekklesia.html.

[56] John Pellowe, "Church/Parachurch Relations: The Body of Christ at Work," Lausanne World Pulse Archives, August 2007, accessed March 14, 2020, https://lausanneworldpulse.com/perspectives-php/767/08-2007.

regardless of who performs the work. Outreach ministry to the community should be to and for the Glory of God and not to a particular denomination, institution, building, ministry or person.

Over the years, "many theologians have debated the role and purpose of para ministries in the context of the local church because the term is not found in the Bible. Though the term is not found in the Bible, the concept is referenced throughout scripture as found in the book of Acts."[57] For example, Paul often acquired funds for various community issues, even in the absence of a church building or meeting place. The church existed as a living organism built on Christ, not on a denomination, person, institution, or local assembly. Wherever believers assembled to share the message of Jesus Christ, the universal church served alongside others in ministry. In the New Testament, the church of Jesus Christ was scattered because of severe persecution from the Roman government and often were not allowed to assemble for worship. Often times believers met and ministered from house to house, and everyone contributed to fulfilling the needs of the body of believers, as well as non-believers, because of their commitment to the message of Jesus Christ.

While the term parachurch may not be mentioned in the Bible explicitly, the Bible describes this term through organized actions towards a specific need or mission. Both national and international para ministries serve as invaluable assets to the community. These ministries can manage crises around the world and within the community that some local churches often cannot. They exist not to replace the local church but to support the work of the universal church of Jesus Christ in a spiritual, informed, organized, practical, and tangible way.

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[57] "Does the Bible Give Support for the Existence of Parachurch Ministries?" Compelling Truth, accessed March 14, 2020, https://www.compellingtruth.org/parachurch-ministries.html.

The para ministry Campus Crusade for Christ Canada supported Driedger's dream by "teaching his church members how to share their faith in three minutes. They then created events, which both gave members an opportunity to invite others and did not cost the church a lot of money. All the members had to do was invite people."[58] As evidence, collaborating with para ministries to expand the ministry's work presents numerous advantages for churches.

The recent COVID-19 pandemic presented opportunities for both the local church and para ministries to mitigate community exigencies across the nation. A ministry that aims to make a difference in the community must intentionally perform ministry at a higher level to address the spiritual and practical concerns of the community. For instance, Jesus came to address the spiritual state of humanity, and His ministry assessed the heart. Ronald Sider, the author of *Churches That Make a Difference*, asserts, "Divine forgiveness . . . was not all there was to Jesus' Gospel. Jesus also taught and demonstrated his dawning kingdom was beginning to transform horizontal socioeconomic relationships wherever people accepted Him."[59] Thus, the local church and para ministries collaborating view the community as a place that requires love and healing. Furthermore, God is concerned about every aspect of society that affects the well-being of humanity. Sider explains this effect on humanity as he states, "The whole Gospel means something more than forgiveness of sins. It includes inner conversion of individuals, physical well-being, the transformation of social and economic relationships, the renewal of communities, and the ultimate triumph of Christ over the forces of evil on a cosmic scale."[60] In addition, Sider

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[58] John Pellowe, "Church/Parachurch Relations: The Body of Christ at Work," Lausanne World Pulse Archives, August 2007, accessed March 14, 2020, https://lausanneworldpulse.com/perspectives-php/767/08-2007.

[59] Ronald J. Sider, *Churches That Make a Difference*: *Reaching Your Community with Good News and Good Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 48.

[60] Ibid., 59-60.

asks, "Is the system [of governance] designed to protect the church from the world or to equip the church to go out into the world?"[61]

How ministries love people from any walk of life illustrates their love for God. Specifically, believers exhibit love through words and deeds, and one should not contradict the other. The Apostle James stated in Jas 2:15-17, "What good is it, my brothers, and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, 'go in peace; keep warm and well fed', but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." Featured on the Christianity.com website, a commentary on James declares, "We are taught that, as love or charity is an operative principle, so is faith, and that neither of them would otherwise be good for anything; and, by trying how it looks for a person to pretend he is very charitable who yet never does any works of charity, you may judge what sense there is in pretending to have faith without the proper and necessary fruits of it."[62]

Homeless Students K-12

In this study, the research focused on students in the Jennings Schools District who are homeless due to a crisis. The founders of Hope House established this organization to ensure students in a crisis could remain in a stable environment without their education being impeded. Homelessness among K-12 students has increased significantly over the past twenty years, and this increase has required public school districts to employ a strategic and targeted approach to

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[61] Ibid., 207.

[62] Matthew Henry, "James 2 Bible Commentary," Matthew Henry Bible Commentary (Complete), accessed September 20, 2023, https://www.christianity.com/bible/commentary/matthew-henry-complete/james/2#:~:text=Complete%20Concise,1%2D7.

moderate the prevalence of homelessness within their schools, as Jennings School District has

done exceptionally well and continues to do. Their innovative approach to meeting the needs of

the students of the JSD has brought hope and stability to the families and students of Hope

House.

The Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (per Title IX, Part

A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the "Every Student Succeeds

Act") states the term "homeless children and youths":

(A) means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.

(B) includes—

> (i) children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; or are abandoned in hospitals; *

> (ii) children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings (within the meaning of section 103(a)(2)(C));

> (iii) children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and

> (iv) migratory children (as such term is defined in section 1309 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965) who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii).[63]

As mentioned in the 2022 National Center for Homeless Education Students in America

Report during "School Year (SY) 2020-21, public schools identified 1,099,221 students who

experienced homelessness and of that number 32,674 Missouri students experienced

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[63] "The McKinney-Vento Definition of Homeless," National Center for Homeless Education, accessed October 15, 2020, https://nche.ed.gov/mckinney-vento-definition/.

homelessness."[64] To address homelessness among students, school districts employ Homeless

Liaisons to provide case management support to assist homeless students and families with

issues related to education and homelessness. According to the National Center for Children in

Poverty,

> Housing plays a pivotal role in the well-being of children and families. Stable housing is a critical factor for positive child and youth development. Unfortunately, the number of homeless families with children has increased in recent years due to the lack of affordable housing. On top of that, the current economic recession and the housing crisis further increase the likelihood of homelessness among children and youth. Youth and children face homelessness for many reasons in the United States, and homelessness impedes their educational progress. Not having a stable living environment can cause a child to experience delayed learning and problems acclimating and coping within the educational system.[65]

Food Desert

Jennings municipality has a population of 14,713, and only two major grocery stores are

located outside of a one-mile radius of its residents. According to the USDA, this area is

classified as a food desert.

> The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines a community as a food desert if:
> - The area has a poverty rate of at least 20%.
> - In urban areas, at least 33% of the population lives more than 1 mile from the nearest grocery store.
> - In rural areas, at least 33% of the population lives more than 10 miles from the nearest grocery store.[66]

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[64] National Center for Homeless Education, *Student Homelessness in America: School Years 2018-19 to 2020-21*, accessed June 20, 2023, https://nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Student-Homelessness-in-America-2022.pdf.

[65] Yumiko Aratani, "Homeless Children and Youth: Causes and Consequences," last modified September 2009, https://www.nccp.org/publication/homeless-children-and-youth-causes-and-consequences/.

[66] Robyn Correll, MPH, "What Are Food Deserts?" Verywell Health, last modified November 1, 2022, https://www.verywellhealth.com/what-are-food-deserts-4165971.

Poverty and systemic inequality operate as the two major factors that contribute to a food desert within a community. According to the article "Addressing Food Deserts," "There are about 100 food deserts throughout the state of Missouri, in both rural and urban areas."[67] The COVID-19 pandemic magnified food deserts, which were already prevalent in numerous communities. The lack of equitably distributed resources in marginalized communities has limited access to healthy and affordable food for various communities. In communities with high poverty rates, people lack the means to purchase healthy food and the transportation to travel to a grocery store outside of a one-mile radius. These factors can and have caused several health issues among adults and children, which leads to health disparities among the most vulnerable. To aid neighborhoods in combating food deserts, federal food programs often allocate funding for local markets, community gardens, and local food pantries. Similarly, para ministries like Strengthen Thy Sister and local churches can also partner with local agencies to address food deserts within the community.

Food Insecurity

Food insecurity is defined as "the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways."[68] While food insecurity had already impacted families nationwide before the COVID-19 crisis, the pandemic magnified this dilemma. The 2020 pandemic literally shut the world down for months, significantly impacting communities, churches, businesses, and organizations. Over one million people perished, and thousands lost employment. During this

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[67] "Addressing Food Deserts & Expanding Food Access Across Missouri.," Empowering Missouri, accessed June 21, 2023, https://empowermissouri.org/addressing-food-deserts/.

[68] "What is Food Insecurity?" U. S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, accessed November 27, 2023, https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/measurement/#insecurity.

time, countless people struggled to provide the basic necessities for their families, such as shelter and food. They encountered difficult decisions, such as choosing whether to buy medicine, purchase food, or pay rent. Several factors contribute to food insecurity, such as poverty, unemployment, chronic health conditions, lack of affordable housing, and lack of access to health care. According to Empower Missouri:

- 13.2% of Missourians live in poverty.
- One in 7 households in Missouri struggle to put food on the table.
- People in rural areas and households led by people of color experience hunger at disproportionately high rates.
- Food banks in Missouri distribute over 120 million pounds of food every year.[69]

Hunger affects all racial and ethnic groups, but in black communities, the rate of food insecurity totals over three times that of white individuals. One in four black individuals faced hunger in 2020.[70] The COVID-19 pandemic proliferated food insecurity among families with children and communities of color, who already faced hunger at much higher rates before the pandemic.[71] According to the USDA Economic Research Service, the following people resided in food-insecure households in 2021:

- 8.6 million adults lived in households with very low food security.
- 5.0 million children lived in food-insecure households in which children, along with adults, were food insecure.
- 521,000 children (0.7 percent of the nation's children) lived in households in which one or more children experienced very low food security.[72]

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[69] "Food Security," Empower Missouri, accessed November 27, 2023, https://empowermissouri.org/policy-priorities/food-security/.

[70] "Meet a Few of the Black Leaders Who Are Fighting Hunger in Their Communities," Feeding America, accessed February 17, 2023, https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-blog/black-leaders-fight-hunger/.

[71] "Food Insecurity in the US Key Statistics & Graphics," USDA Economic Research Service, accessed March 14, 2022, https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/key-statistics-graphics/.

[72] USDA Economic Research Service, "Food Insecure Households," accessed March 14, 2022, https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/key-statistics-graphics/#trends.

In 2021, the prevalence of food insecurity varied considerably among household types.

Figure 1 shows the rates of food insecurity were higher than the national average (10.2 percent)

for the following groups:

- All households with children (12.5 percent).
- Households with children under age 6 (12.9 percent).
- Households with children headed by a single woman (24.3 percent) or a single man (16.2 percent).
- Women living alone (13.2 percent) and men living alone (12.3 percent).
- Households with Black, non-Hispanic (19.8 percent) and Hispanic (16.2 percent) reference persons (a household reference person is an adult household member in whose name the housing unit is owned or rented).
- Households with incomes below 185 percent of the poverty threshold (26.5 percent; the federal poverty line was $27,479 for a family of four in 2021).[73]

Prevalence of food insecurity, by selected household characteristics, 2021

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 2021 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.
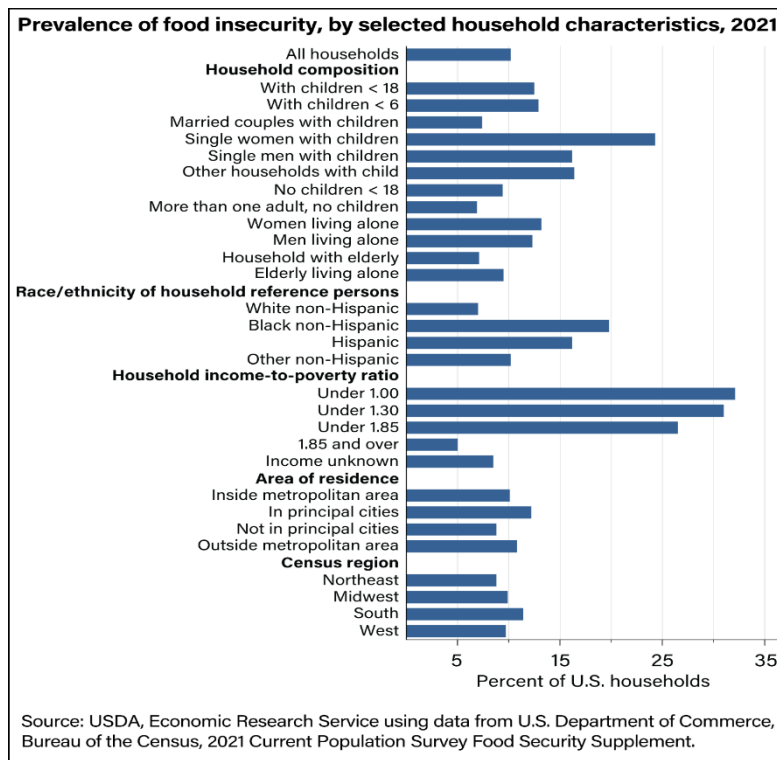
Figure 1: Prevalence of Food Insecurity by Selected Household Characteristics, 2021

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[73] USDA Economic Research, "Prevalence of Food Insecurity," accessed March 14, 2022, https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/key-statistics-graphics/#trends.

Figure 2 shows how the prevalence rates of food insecurity differed from state to state. Data were combined to provide more reliable statistics at the state level. During this three-year period, estimated prevalence rates of food insecurity ranged from 5.7 percent in New Hampshire to 15.3 percent in Mississippi; estimated prevalence rates of very low food security ranged from 2.3 percent in Minnesota to 6.5 percent in Louisiana.

As shown in Figures 1 and 2, food insecurity impacted families and communities across the nation. Federal and local governments, along with organizations within the community, have joined efforts to address the burgeoning problem. School districts like Jennings have recognized the effect food insecurity has on students and have been proactive in mitigating this dilemma through programs and partnerships aimed at assisting families and students.

Figure 2: Prevalence of Food Insecurity, average 2019-21
https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/key-statistics-graphics/#trends

To help address and combat food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government enacted the Pandemic Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Emergency Allotments (EA) to assist families with providing food for their families. "A study estimated that EAs kept 4.2 million people above the poverty line in the last quarter of 2021, reducing poverty by 10 percent—and child poverty by 14 percent—in states with EAs at the time. The estimated reduction in poverty rates due to EAs was highest for Black and Latino people".[74] The federal government also enacted the Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT) program to assist school children. This program provided "temporary benefits for children who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch but did not receive meals at school or daycare due to closure, hybrid, or virtual learning. The benefits help cover food costs from September 2020 through May 2021".[75] These federal programs provided temporary relief from food insecurity, but once the programs ended, families again faced the daunting reality of struggling to provide food for their families. While the problem existed prior to the pandemic and beyond, agencies such as Operation Food Search and the St. Louis Area Food Bank play a major role in supporting families who struggle with food insecurity. These agencies operate year-round to support families who would otherwise continue to endure the challenge of providing affordable and nutritious food for their families.

Many local governments actively labor to combat food insecurity, which takes a collective effort to address such a practical and often complex problem. Addressing food

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[74] Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. "Temporary Pandemic Snap Benefits Will End In Remaining 35 States in March 2023," https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/temporary-pandemic-snap-benefits-will-end-in-remaining-35-states-in-march#:~:text=Temporary%20Pandemic%20SNAP%20B fits%20Will,on%20Budget%20and%20Policy%20Priorities. accessed November 27.

[75] "COVID-19 Food Stamp (SNAP) Benefits Information," Missouri Department of Social Services, accessed November 27, 2023, https://mydss.mo.gov/covid-food-stamp-info.

insecurity through policy change helps solve the problem at the level of government systems.

Empower Missouri says, "There needs to be comprehensive policy and programmatic strategies

at the governmental level to fully address the need. Empower Missouri recommends these long-

term proposals to address hunger in Missouri:

- Streamline nutrition program implementation for the state and non-profit partners and streamline access to nutrition programs for families.
- Increase outreach and education about the benefits of WIC, with increased participation in the program as the ultimate goal.
- Expand access to affordable and nutritious food in rural areas by addressing food deserts.
- Address, through policy changes, barriers for seniors and people with disabilities with accessing nutrition programs."[76]

Addressing food insecurity at all levels is critical to alleviating the problem in the long

term. Fortunately, ministries have an opportunity to partner with organizations that are tackling

the problem at a grassroots level. They can also collaborate with their local government to lobby

for policies that will change how local and federal systems address food insecurity within

marginalized, under-resourced, and rural communities.

Theological Foundations

The focus of Jesus Christ's ministry entailed doing the will of His Father on the earth.

Hence, Jesus manifested to seek and save the spiritually lost. He also cared deeply about

humanity's quality of life in every practical area and exemplified it through His love and

consideration for people. Theodore Roosevelt once said, "Nobody cares about how much you

know until they know how much you care."[77] As a physical embodiment of God's love, Jesus

showed humanity how much He cared. Jesus not only shared the gospel but also served the needs

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[76] "Food Security," Empower Missouri, accessed November 27, 2023, https://empowermissouri.org/policy-priorities/food-security/.

[77] "Theodore Roosevelt Quotes," Theodore Roosevelt Center at Dickinson State University, accessed January 14, 2020, https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Learn-About-TR/TR-Quotes?page=112.

of others, confronted and remedied the ills of their community, and advised the disciples to do the same. John 4:34 declares, "Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work." Jesus came to bring salvation and eternal life to all who would believe in Him. In His humanity, Jesus dwelt among people on the earth to fulfill a specific purpose. He came to serve and not to be served. As Jesus had good works to do, Christians also have good works to do individually and collectively, "which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph 2:10). This work encompasses ministries proclaiming their faith while seeking opportunities to do good in their community. It compels the universal church to satisfy the interests of others by sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ while helping to build resilient communities. Ultimately, God has created all of humanity equally and without partiality in loving everyone the same. Francis Schaeffer, the author of *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century*, states, "Because every man is made in the image of God and has, therefore, aspirations for love, there is something that can be in every geographical climate—in every point of time—which cannot fail to arrest his attention. What is it? The love that true Christians show for each other and not just for their own party."[78]

In Philippians, Paul declares, "If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfill ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem others better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Phil 2:1-4). Christ has called the church to be a light to a dying world and a ray of hope where

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[78] Francis Schaeffer, "The Mark of the Christian," in *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1977), 139.

there seems to be no hope. Wherever a church or ministry is planted, it assumes the responsibility to tackle the ills of that community and to partake in the collective solution. The church cannot execute the work alone, however. A collaborative effort must exist between the church and the community to mitigate the disparities of the community. The church must not sit in the building and hope people will come and serve them; it must be intentional about outreach and community partnerships that will advance and strengthen the community. Malphurs says, "The church has to be so much more than a holy huddle or an inward-focused family that cares for its own and no one else. Instead, the church has a God-driven Christ-given directive to be outward focused on a lost dying world that desperately needs a Savior."[79]

God consistently expressed concern about the community and enforced principles and practices that considered the welfare of all humanity. To ensure everyone had something to eat and no food insecurities or food deserts existed within the community in the Old Testament, farmers received instructions not to glean their fields to the edge and to leave a portion of the crop for the poor and the stranger (Lev 19:10). Every seven years, the field was not to be touched. Often, disparities exist because of greed and inequitable systems and policies that oppress the marginalized within a community. Limited resources based on community needs engender disparities as well. Therefore, being informed about the ills of society requires an intentional effort to confront systems and policies that perpetuate inequities while offering solutions to such disparities.

To formulate an effective solution, leaders within the faith community, as stated before, must dissect the demographics and ethnographics of a community and partner with community

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[79] Aubrey, Malphurs. *Advanced Strategic Planning: A 21st-Century for Church and Ministry Leaders.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2013.

organizations and experts who can provide professional insight and resources regarding community disparities. Lausanne describes this as the exegesis of a city. Ministries must venture to understand the context of their community to address their needs. With God's grace and strength, along with a willingness to develop collaborative partnerships, ministries can fulfill the needs of the community efficaciously.

Forming partnerships with organizations beyond the church stands as a fundamental element of nurturing and actualizing the work of the ministry. Sometimes, ministries may refuse to collaborate with organizations that may not share the same beliefs. The article "Towards the Transformation of Our Cities/Regions" emphasizes the importance of developing a framework for partnerships. The author states, "A major challenge for those seeking to collaborate is how to hold on to their distinctives, whether in approach, ministry or theology, while humbly working for Kingdom transformation with those who don't share their perspective."[80] Throughout scripture, God appointed men and women such as Joseph, Deborah, Nehemiah, Ezra, Esther, Pricilla, and Phoebe to fulfill God's purpose and plan without compromising the principles of God. All held positions within the body of Christ and society to demonstrate God's love and concern for humanity. Wherever the church lacked the capacity or infrastructure to pursue an issue, these individuals formed alliances and partnerships in those areas within and beyond the Christian faith. Likewise, partnerships with organizations outside of the ministry can expose ministries to knowledge, infrastructure, resources, and assets they may not have access to otherwise. This process embodies not an abandonment of faith but a demonstration of humility and a willingness to collaborate for the betterment of the community. As mentioned in "Towards the Transformation of Our Cities/Regions", "This lays a foundation for our need to collaborate

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[80] Lausanne Occasional Paper: "Towards the Transformation of Our Cities/Regions," 40.

and partner with those of differing worldviews and belief systems. We have chosen to sum up this principle in the phrase 'unity without uniformity'."[81] In other words, the universal church must be willing to cooperate to fulfill the will of God. Fulfilling the will of God necessitates a higher level of reasoning and embodies the Word of God in action by planting seeds of love and compassion through good deeds. The world will know the church by its love for its neighbors, and scripture speaks explicitly to God's concern for society and how Christ moved within the community of His day, offering tangible and practical solutions for their exigencies. Whether healing the sick, feeding the hungry, or confronting injustices, Jesus methodically approached matters with a solution. According to "Towards the Transformation of Our Cities/Regions," "As we listen to Scripture and walk through our various situations in life, we are faced with a question. How can we hear and apply God's word in our cities and neighborhoods?"[82] The answer to this question involves the universal church acknowledging the interests of others by sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ through good works to help build stronger communities.

Communities across the nation face a surplus of disparities such as economic, gender, social, health care, mental health, and racial disparities, all of which have contributed to the deterioration of communities over the years. While many local churches and ministries nationally and internationally have done and continue to do amazing work within their communities, unfortunately, there are some that fail to leverage ministry and community partnerships to help mitigate community needs. The notion that the ministries must be separate from the systems that govern communities rather than seeking to perform ministry in the marketplace through a holistic approach by engaging the spiritual and social aspects of humanity

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[81] Ibid., 40

[82] Ibid.

limits the reach of the universal church. Above all, the universal church is called to be a light to a dying world and a ray of hope where there seems to be no hope. It becomes the responsibility of a church or ministry to address the ills of the community in which it is planted and to become a part of the collective solution. However, the universal church cannot do the work alone, and the community cannot operate in silos. The church and the community must collaborate to alleviate disparities within the community. Furthermore, the church must not sit in the building and hope people will come and serve them. Instead, it must be intentional about outreach and community partnerships that will help them build stronger and more vivacious communities. Some churches and ministries focus solely on sharing the message of the gospel without having an external lens for the community that will present an opportunity for them to demonstrate their beliefs. For instance, the Salvation Army National Women's Ministry USA has a spiritual and community component that allows the universal church to move beyond the walls of the physical building. The organization offers programming for worship, education, fellowship, and community service opportunities, as well as creative outreach and focus group ideas that meet the needs of local and women.[83] This ministry provides a balanced approach to ministry that includes an outward focus on the community.

Throughout scripture, God expressed concern about the community and established principles and practices that considered the welfare of humanity, such as in Lev 25:35, Deut 15:11, Mark 10:21, and Acts 9:36. Disparities typically exist because of systems and policies that oppress the rejected and marginalized within the community. Serving the needs of the community can be accomplished by God's grace, strength, and provision. Whether it be a local

[83] "About Women's Ministries," The Salvation Army USA Women's Ministry, accessed January 17, 2022, https://wmresources.org/about-us/.

church or para ministry, the universal church must pray, walk by faith, and be willing to cultivate strategic collaborative partnerships that address community needs.

Theoretical Foundations

Ministries around the world have done and continue to do tremendous feats in serving their communities through outreach. This research project discusses the role of ministry and community in leveraging partnerships to address community needs. Theoretically, ministries demonstrate the gospel in word and deed when seeking community-building partnerships. They embody an outward focus intentionally directed toward a specific need within their local community. Community-building partnerships afford ministries the opportunity to expand their outreach and cultivate relationships around a common goal of strengthening their communities. Particularly, the ministry will adopt a peripheral view of the community and act on what they see. The ministry must not only keep their eyes on Jesus but also observe what transpires to the right and left of them. These acts illustrate what a ministry believes about its neighbor. Essentially, the world will know believers in Jesus Christ by their love for their neighbor. Throughout the nation, countless communities experience a myriad of disparities that have induced chaos in the community. Collaborative partnerships provide an opportunity to confront these problems by connecting ministries to subject-matter experts and resources.

Shouldering the diverse needs of a community can be effectuated through partnerships that align with the mission and vision of a ministry. As stated before, this feat can be attained without compromising the guiding principles and precepts that govern both. Propitious partnerships involve a designated arrangement where parties agree to collaborate to advance their mutual interests. In this case, Strengthen Thy Sister partnered with Jennings School District Hope House to assist families and students within the school district who faced a plethora of crises. Demonstrating what a ministry believes concerning its local community exemplifies the

greatest expression of love and compassion. As stated in the article "Engaging and Partnering

with Faith-Based Organizations in Initiatives for Children, Youth, and Families,"

> The fact is that faith-based organizations have long been integral to the safety network of services and resources in most communities, from church-sponsored emergency food pantries to affordable housing. There is a lengthy history of partnership between government and the charitable work of faith-based communities . . . We advocate an inclusive approach to partnerships so that your community can mobilize the greatest number and variety of resources and expertise with the goal of supporting healthier children, families, and communities.[84]

A church or ministry that cultivates fellowship and unity with other groups, companies,

and organizations in the community produces a more expansive impact and receives a greater

opportunity to reach more people with the hope of Jesus. Thus, effective ministry partnerships

generate change that can be reflected in the communities they serve. The community serves as an

extension of the people who attend local churches or those who partake in ministry through para

ministries. In Joe Daniels's article, "Your Community is Your Congregation," he shares that

"engaging the community is essential to reaching the community."[85] Ministries must know their

community, and this does not have to be a "complex process."[86] He further states, "The back

alleys are our altars of blessings. Farmlands are our fields of opportunity. New housing

developments become our narthex through which new life is ushered."[87] To effect such change,

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[84] "Engaging and Partnering with Faith-Based Organizations in Initiatives for Children, Youth, and Families," Institute for Educational Leadership, accessed March 29, 2023, https://jliflc.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/toolkit_06.pdf.

[85] Joe Daniels, "Your Community is Your Congregation," Lewis Center for Church Leadership, accessed March 16, 2023. https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/your-community-is-your-congregation/.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Ibid.

scripture commands the universal church to go into the world, to share the love of Christ, and to alleviate the ills of society. Christ stated in Luke 4:18-21,

> The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all of them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, this day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.

In this passage, Jesus conveys how God has anointed Him not only to bring the good news of salvation but also to upend the ills of society. Connecting the universal church and community through coordinated systems enables both entities to leverage their mission, vision, and purpose within the community. It provides an opportunity to put theology into practice by having an external focus on the community in a designated area or abroad.

Different levels of partnerships exist from which various types of partnerships emerge depending on the levels. From there, partners develop the specific criteria for those partnerships. Ultimately, the ministry's external focus and ability to provide resources to implement an outreach project determines the various levels and types of partnerships.

In Joy Skjegstad's book, *7 Creative Models for Community Ministry*, she details the following models that local churches or ministries can implement as outreach to the community: donating goods or unrestricted money as a practical way to respond instantaneously to needs within the community and ministries partnering with and supporting organizations in need of these resources.[88] Another method involves mobilizing volunteers for annual community events or initiatives. Organizations often lack the staff and budget to execute these events, and by providing volunteers, ministries receive an opportunity to be present and to share their time and

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[88] Joy Skjegstad, *7 Creative Models to Community Ministry* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2013), 5.

talents.[89] As evidenced in these models, partnerships can occur on different levels, and the

partners' shared mission and vision will determine the level of partnership. Therefore,

connecting visions and missions to fulfill a community need presents a promising opportunity for

collaboration.[90] Additionally, advocating around public policy serves as an essential model for

ministries to develop with community organizations that possess the required knowledge and

expertise. Addressing public policy aims to effect change within the community on a systemic

level. Specifically, public policy tackles the root causes of problems within the community and

how they can change through policies.[91] Furthermore, engaging in community organizing

encompasses confronting injustices and how the community conducts business. It focuses on

developing relationships to "form coalitions around issues" that affect the community.[92] The

process of developing a ministry program must focus on addressing a specific need. Therefore,

ministries must ask: "Is there a need for the program, and does the ministry have the resources

and capacity to implement the program."[93] The final model Skjegstad describes focuses on a

church-based nonprofit. Creating a not-for-profit organization necessitates much prayer and

strategic planning to ensure the not-for-profit meets a need and aligns with the church's or

ministry's mission and vision. This process requires conducting community research to assess if

other nonprofits are engaging in the same efforts. According to Skjegstad, "Nonprofits are not

for getting money or doing it because everyone is," but the focus must be to meet a need within

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[89] Ibid., 41-52.

[90] Ibid., 67-80.

[91] Ibid., 81-94.

[92] Ibid., 95-108.

[93] Ibid., 109-122.

the church or community.[94] These models apply to both the church and para ministries, and with

any model, certain benefits and challenges may accompany selecting, developing, and

implementing a ministry model. Accordingly, the decision to launch any ministry must be led by

God, undergirded with much prayer, strategically planned, and thoroughly researched. This

decision must be clear and capable of guiding the mission, as the mission communicates what

will be done, and the vision describes how it will be done. Thus, the mission and vision of the

ministry will determine the level of partnership, the type of partnership, and the criteria that will

guide the partnership.

A ministry partnership can be developed from one of the previously discussed models. In

addition, different levels of partnerships can be implemented between the community and

ministry, which the selected model for outreach determines. Sometimes, the ministry possesses

the vision, and the community partnership retains the resources, or vice versa. God is sovereign,

and He can fulfill His purpose and plan through whomever He chooses and how He chooses.

Thus, the focus involves developing strategic partnerships to advance the community or the

world according to what God has called the specific ministry to do. It also encompasses fulfilling

the Great Commission by making disciples, which includes teaching one how to share and to live

the gospel, all while serving and meeting the needs of humanity, their neighbor. To tell a hungry

and homeless person Jesus loves them and died for their sins and does not aim to satisfy their

basic need contradicts the message of the gospel. Fulfilling the natural need first provides an

opportunity for the gospel to be expressed and attained through one's actions. Jesus often

addressed the immediate needs of those He came in contact with first before He spoke to the

need for salvation and eternal life.

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[94] Ibid., 124-140.

What God has called the body of Christ to do collectively and individually drives

multiple levels of partnerships. One level of partnership may incorporate a goal of evangelism

and sharing the gospel, as seen with Billy Graham's Evangelistic Association, which spreads the

gospel of Jesus Christ. Through this para-ministry endeavor, millions have accepted Christ as

their Lord and Savior and have been dispersed to local churches across the nation. The ministry

also serves the community nationally and internationally through several para-outreach

ministries such as Samaritan's Purse, Discipleship Training, and Youth for Christ.[95] Likewise,

Mercy Ships is an international charity based on Christian values that supplies medical and

health care services for impoverished countries around the world.[96] Living Proof Ministries

provides biblical studies so that individuals can know Christ more intimately.[97] Additionally,

Prison Fellowship Ministries assists current incarcerated persons, former incarcerated persons,

and their families. The ministry also advocates for justice reform. Compassion International and

Going Beyond Ministries "is focused on the expository teaching of the Word of God."[98] Bishop

Michael Jones, the pastor of Friendly Temple Church in St. Louis, Missouri, has sustained an

outward vision toward the community and has made a substantial impact in the greater St. Louis

metropolitan area, focusing on community revitalization and development along with other

outreach initiatives. Because of Bishop Jones's vision towards the community through

partnership, in 2003, funding from Housing Urban Development and a partnership with St.

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[95] "What We Do," The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, accessed February 25, 2023, https://billygraham.org/what-we-do.

[96] "About Us," Mercy Ships, accessed February 25, 2023, https://www.mercyships.org/about-us/.

[97] Living Proof Ministries, accessed February 20, 2023, https://www.lproof.org/.

[98] "About," Going Beyond Ministries, accessed February 13, 2023, https://www.goingbeyond.com/minis-try/about-going-beyond-ministries/.

Andrew's Management Services allowed the Friendly Senior Village Apartments to be established. Over one hundred apartments provide affordable housing for senior citizens in an under-resourced and marginalized community because a church leveraged community partnerships to meet a specific need. Also, Friendly Temple Church houses a Midwest Community Bank in their St. Louis City location. The Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis Inc. Pulpit to Porches initiative features the Grill to Glory program, which partners with local churches within the community to help eradicate the issues plaguing urban neighborhoods. As mentioned on their website, "The vision of Pulpit to Porches is to establish the neighborhood church as a focal point for families in immediate need."[99] This partnership also affords local churches an opportunity to connect with the broader community and to share the gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed. Community organizations, churches, para ministries, and governments conjoining both locally and nationally produce a collective opportunity to change humanity's quality of life through strategic collaboration.

An ideal partnership emerges when several entities collaborate, focusing specifically on the common good of all. For example, the church and para ministries can cofunction to target a specific area of focus. This could include building affordable housing, developing and starting several community gardens, opening a grocery store, evangelizing a specific area, hosting Bible classes for the unhoused, organizing financial literacy classes for youth and adults and childcare, or providing resources and financial support to a community organization that aligns with their area of outreach. Partnering with local Work Force Development programs to host job fairs, donate career clothing, provide transportation vouchers or childcare scholarships, or teach an employment-related skill class can generate invaluable opportunities for ministry outreach.

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[99] "Serving Our Streets," Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis, accessed February 26, 2023, https://www.ulstl.com/serving-our-streets.html.

Another level of partnership may entail advocating for social justice regarding a specific issue in the community or population. Both the local church and para ministries can partner with a community organization that possesses knowledge and expertise in social justice advocacy. The key is to strategically connect with parties with the same mission, vision, and passion for the community and the infrastructure to implement the project effectively and efficiently.

The criterion for partnerships proves to be critical when organizations collaborate. Each partner's position, role, and purpose for the partnership must be clearly defined and outlined. When partnering to evangelize a community for Christ, both entities must embody the same aim of sharing Jesus Christ according to scripture, not according to a specific denomination. If the ministry aspires to partner with a community organization, then the ministry must first understand the organization's policy and position and whether the ministry can share the gospel. The partnership must be orchestrated with decency and order and with respect for each entity's beliefs and practices.

Strengthen Thy Sister, a nonprofit ministry, incorporated a community outreach component into the ministry's mission and vision and has implemented several community service partnerships over the past thirteen years.[100] The foundation of Strengthen Thy Sister stands on the principles of the gospel and a commitment to share the love of Christ with humanity in word and deed. By implementing strategic planning processes that include external outreach to the community, churches, and ministries can focus on being proactive in crises rather than reactive. The church and ministry that seek to establish relationships and community partnerships before the onset of a crisis can be prepared to serve in a targeted, collaborative, and effective manner during the crisis.

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[100] "Community Service Initiatives," Strengthen Thy Sister, accessed September 22, 2023, http://www.strengthenthysister.org/Community-Service.html.

The proposed project design for outreach ministries and organizations to build collaborative partnerships to address community needs will produce outreach opportunities while strengthening communities. When ministries and the community conjoin to achieve specific goals outlined in a strategic plan, they can maximize partnerships to create sustainable systems that improve humanity's quality of life.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter dissects the DMIN project intervention design and expounds on how the researcher conducted the study and implemented the project. The researcher designed a relevant and practical project that aligned biblically with Strengthen Thy Sister's outward vision to attend to the interests of others within the community (Appendix A). This project design can assist with developing new outreach ministries to the community through partnerships. The design can be tailored to any ministry's mission and specific area of focus, infrastructure, resources, and community partnerships regarding outreach ministry. For ministries with existing partnerships within the community, this design can assist them with revisiting and expanding those partnerships based on the ministry's mission and vision and community needs.

The DMIN project afforded Strengthen Thy Sister an opportunity to execute a relevant, targeted, and tangible outreach project to address a specific community exigency while demonstrating Christ's love in word and deed. To attain the goals of the DMIN outreach ministry expansion project, the researcher leveraged ministry and community partnerships with an invested interest in strengthening the community. Ministries must intentionally collaborate with the broader community to garner an informed, diverse, and collective perspective of the area where the ministry aims to achieve outreach ministry outcomes. Thus, developing a model for "outcome-driven collaboration" functions as a significant aspect of project design.[101] In *Leap of Reason*, Morino emphasizes the importance of organizations realizing "we can't get there from here, and we can't get there alone."[102] Collaboration assists each entity in leveraging experience,

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[101] Mario Morino, *Leap of Reasoning: Managing to Outcomes in an Area of Scarcity* (Washington, DC: Venture Philanthropy Partners, 2011), 55.

[102] Ibid., 55.

knowledge, and resources to produce a greater collective impact. The STS outreach ministry has consistently incorporated collaboration and partnerships in outreach, understanding the ministry cannot achieve its desired outreach outcomes without coalescing with those whose mission aligns with the purpose of the outreach ministry.

This intervention design was not intended to solve a community problem but to present a design that showcases how engaging the community through strategic and intentional partnerships can help exercise theology by assisting with meeting community needs. The design takes ministries beyond the walls of the ministry and allows them to develop partnerships with experienced practitioners and subject matter experts regarding the community and its multiple exigencies. This design also enables ministries to be proactive, intentional and targeted toward a specific area of passion and focus for outreach through partnerships, as para ministries do. Undoubtedly, local churches and para ministries can unite to partner with community organizations to address a surplus of needs within the community. The key entails identifying a collective area of ministry focus, passion, and required resources and then conjoining with those who can assist with realizing the desired outcome of the outreach ministry and community partnership directed toward a specific need.

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) and Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

The DMIN project required the researcher to complete eight extensive training modules through the "Institutional Review Board Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative for Social and Behavioral Researchers." The training included History and Ethical Principles, Defining Research with Human Subjects, Federal Regulations, Belmont Report, Assessing Risk, Informed Consent, Privacy and Confidentiality, Populations in Research Requiring Additional Considerations and/or Protections, Internet-based Research, Unanticipated Problems, and

Reporting Requirements in Social and Behavioral Research and its Principles. Upon completing

the training, the researcher submitted a DMIN project application to the Institutional Review

Board for review and implementation approval. The process involved the researcher formulating

a project design, a community partner project request letter, a participant recruitment letter, a

participant consent form, pre- and post-questionnaires, and a project outcomes questionnaire.

Following the completion of the application, the researcher submitted the project to the DMIN

project mentor for approval and submission to the Institutional Review Board for review and

approval. The project implementation process began once the researcher received approval from

the IRB to implement the outreach expansion project (Appendix L).

Intervention Design

The researcher devised the ministry outreach project intervention design according to the

DMIN program criteria to develop a ministry project within the current ministry context that

addressed a specific area within the ministry, and that was to expand outreach to the local

community through leveraging ministry and community partnerships. Specifically, the project

design included developing the project framework, which comprised the overall structure,

theoretical foundation, implementation, and criteria to measure and evaluate the effectiveness of

the project implementation. In addition, the researcher composed pre- and post-questionnaires,

focus group discussion questions, and project outcome questions.

The development process began with the researcher sharing the project design with the

STS board of directors and discussing how the design and project reflected the ministry's

purpose and outreach vision toward the community through partnership and collaboration.

During this discussion, the researcher reiterated how the expansion project aligned with the

ministry's mission and vision and presented an external focus on the community (Appendix A).

This outward peripheral focus has created and continues to create opportunities for STS to

demonstrate their consistent commitment to community outreach and the ministry's capacity to

address and support community needs through partnerships. Having an outward focus influenced

the researcher's intentionality about developing a practical and targeted design that allowed the

ministry to respond expeditiously and efficiently to an existing community exigency absent of

barriers, theocracy, and unnecessary processes that would have impeded the implementation

process. Ensuring the project implementation process remained free of internal barriers proved

critical to the implementation and overall success of the project. Once the researcher determined

the DMIN project, STS aimed to partner with two churches within the community to collaborate

on the project. Due to unforeseen challenges many churches faced during the COVID-19

pandemic, such as one church's lengthy approval process, the partnership was infeasible because

of the time sensitivity of implementing the project during an ongoing community crisis. The

second church never responded to the request to participate in the project. Nevertheless,

collaboration between the church and para ministries has and continues to provide propitious

opportunities for both entities to combine their gifts, talents, and resources to demonstrate the

love of Christ through outreach ministry to the community. For instance, para ministries like

Samaritan Purse collaborate with churches and other para ministries across the world to meet

national and international community needs. Collaboration and partnership between churches

and para ministries also illustrate and promote unity within the body of Christ and beyond.

This project provided STS an opportunity to evaluate and discuss the ministry's current

strategic planning process regarding community outreach and how those internal processes allow

for relevant community-driven outreach focused on a mission to serve the broader community.

Ministries should continuously seek how to enhance outreach ministry to the community by

accessing community needs, their outreach plan, ministry infrastructure, resources, staffing, and

external relationships. This process should also include being honest about any internal barriers or covert biases toward a particular race, marginalized community, geographical area, or sect of people that may exist. All these factors can inhibit ministries from being responsive in addressing the needs of their community through proactive, strategic, and targeted partnerships.

Strengthen Thy Sister has consistently been intentional about focusing on diverse and smaller organizations that perform impactful work within the community but lack the marketing budget that larger organizations employ to advertise their services extensively to the community. These organizations depend on support from partners, stakeholders, and the broader community to provide services to targeted and diverse populations.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, STS shared and discussed updates from several local and national agencies, such as local health departments, hospitals, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), regarding the pandemic's impact on communities. These discussions influenced the project design and implementation process, which operated within the "Action Project Cycle" framework. The multi-method approach aligned with the outreach expansion project's overall intervention design and implementation process.[103]

The researcher specifically collected and analyzed data regarding COVID-19, communities disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, homeless K-12 students, food deserts, and food insecurity. Based on this information, the researcher developed a project to support the Jennings School District Hope Houses. Sensing's Action Project Cycle graph provided steps within the project cycle, including the context that addressed the researcher's years of experience serving in ministry and working in the social service profession. (Figure 3).

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[103] Tim Sensing. *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 64.

Within the ministry context, the researcher identified an opportunity to expand the outreach ministry, particularly during a national COVID-19 crisis, by leveraging ministry and community partnerships. Next, the researcher outlined steps to specify the actions needed to implement the project and reevaluated the previously researched and analyzed data, which confirmed the problem addressed within the community.

Figure 3: An Action Project Cycle
Source: "An Action Project Cycle" diagram. Reprinted
from Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods
Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses, 64*.

The project design enabled STS to partner with Jennings School District, whose established credibility, specialized expertise, and unique infrastructure helped implement the project promptly and efficaciously. STS employed tangible resources through the ministry and its project participants' financial contributions to support the service and work of JSD Hope Houses. Because of the ministry and JSD leadership's proactive strategic planning, both were poised to continue serving the community by educating students and fulfilling their needs during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

Using the S.M.A.R.T. goals criteria, the intervention design development process ensured the project design remained specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely. The DMIN project operated with a specific goal of expanding STS ministry outreach by leveraging ministry and community partnerships to address a relevant and current need in the community during the

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COVID-19 crisis. Additionally, the S.M.A.R.T. goals criteria process necessitated the ministry determining the requirements and limitations of the project and specifying the purpose and benefits of fulfilling a need in the community through outreach expansion. Next, the researcher focused on ensuring that the outreach project was measurable throughout the implementation process. Because measures establish concrete criteria for measuring progress toward attaining a goal, this process involved ensuring STS and its participants could acquire the necessary monetary resources within the designated time frame. The participants and partners possessed the infrastructure, programming, skill, willingness, and financial resources required to achieve the goal, which proved to be critical to the execution and desired outcomes of the project. Subsequently, the researcher addressed the project as being realistic, given the limitation of implementing the project during a global pandemic with several health protocols and precautions in effect. Finally, the goal targeted the limited time frame allotted to execute the project to undertake a tangible and crucial need during a community crisis without delay.

Following the development of the intervention design, the researcher presented the intervention design to the STS board of directors, and they discussed the ministry's commitment to serve the community through the vision of looking to the interests of others and how it would continue to manifest through the implementation of the expansion project (Appendix A). The next step encompassed the researcher reviewing the ministry's strategic plan, which included the geographic area of St. Louis City and County, particularly the North County area. In addition, the researcher revisited the demographics of the area, as discussed in Chapter 1, and the devastating impact of COVID-19 on the community, along with the need to help strengthen the community during an adverse time. The researcher and STS board of directors selected Jennings School District as a partner to implement the project with STS because of the widespread impact

of the COVID-19 pandemic within the community and Jennings municipality being classified as a food desert and where families and students within the Jennings School District face food insecurity. The focus was to assist the students and families that resided at JSD Hope Houses.

Implementation of Intervention Design

The researcher initiated the implementation process after the Institutional Review Board provided the approval letter for the ministry's outreach expansion project (Appendix L). The time frame for the project, as outlined in Appendix B, was established according to the nature of the national crisis and the provision of a timely response. The entire implementation process spanned twelve weeks, with the requisite resources being provided within the first two weeks of the project implementation. STS began the project implementation expeditiously, as the ministry had vetted the school district years prior and had an established relationship with the school district.

This partnership did not compromise the theological principles of the ministry or the JSD school policy. The Nonprofit Risk Management Center article on "Vetting Partner Organizations and Creating MOUs" provides excellent guidance for ministries or organizations to utilize before entering partnerships or collaborating. Depending on the type of partnership, the article outlines steps that must be enacted during the vetting process, such as "confirming compatibility; this would also include the mission of each entity, understanding motivations, conducting due diligence, interpreting the message, clarifying expectations and put it in writing."[104] When a ministry designates an organization for partnership, the vetting process must be completed before entering the partnership to ensure the collaboration aligns with the ministry and the partnering organization's mission, vision, and internal policies.

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[104] Nonprofit Risk Management Center, "Vetting Partner Organizations & Drafting MOUs," accessed March 30, 2023, https://nonprofitrisk.org/resources/articles/community-collaboration/.

The researcher contacted the Jennings School District superintendent of secondary education and Director of Hope House, Dr. Hicks-Prophet, to propose the DMIN project and to schedule a meeting to discuss the project (Table 1). She arranged a meeting with the JSD Superintendent, Dr. Knight, within a week. During the meeting, the researcher presented the Liberty DMIN project and STS's vision to expand its ministry outreach to serve the community, specifically to assist with addressing food insecurity among the Jennings School District students. The Hope House director shared the vision and endeavors of Hope House, the many challenges JSD students face, and the student's need for the support Hope House provides. Dr. Hicks-Prophet also disclosed how Hope House functions as a not-for-profit organization that depends on donations and community support to operate the homes, particularly financial donations or operational items for the facility and the students, instead of funding from the school district. In addition, she revealed how providing groceries for the homes would offset the budget and assist with covering other budget items. A monthly grocery budget of $900.00 for both homes would provide three nutritional meals a day and snacks for up to fourteen individuals. Next, the researcher shared that the project was focused on identifying a current need in the North County community that aligned with the ministry's outward focus and could provide tangible support through the ministry, project participants, and partner resources. Following this discussion, the JSD superintendent, Dr. Knight, approved the project for implementation and thanked STS for its support and for including JSD in the DMIN project. After the meeting, the researcher sent an official follow-up letter and email to JSD regarding the outreach expansion project (Appendix F). Overall, the partnership included strengthening Thy Sister, outlining each partner's role, responsibilities, and professional boundaries regarding

policies, procedures, and protocols, and implementing the project according to Jennings School

District Hope House policy.

Table 1: Overview of the Project Timeline

Week 1	January 2022
Strengthen Thy Sister President submitted a letter to the Jennings School District Superintendent to present the Liberty DMIN thesis project and seek approval to implement it. The parties met and permission was granted to implement the project.	
Week 2	January 2022
The Strengthen Thy Sister Board of Directors and Strengthen Thy Sister participants will meet via Zoom to discuss the project plan and the ministry outreach expansion community organization Jennings School District Hope House for homeless students and families facing crisis. Appendix A-B

Strengthen Thy Sister participants will complete the pre-anonymous questionnaire and review public data regarding COVID-19, food insecurity, food deserts, and homeless students in the Jennings School District. Appendix C | |
Week 2	January 2022
The Strengthen Thy Sister board of directors, Strengthen Thy Sister participants, and Jennings Hope House executive director will meet. During this meeting, the Jennings Hope House Director will present and explain the Hope House program and how it assists homeless students and families facing crisis. Strengthen Thy Sister will present the ministry outreach expansion project again and the implementation process.	
Week 3-12	January - March 31, 2022
Strengthen Thy Sister and its participants will begin implementing the project at Hope House. This process includes completing the pre- and post-questionnaires. (Appendix C-D)

Strengthen Thy Sister, and participants will provide groceries for Hope House for three months (January – March) to assist with providing meals to the students and families residing at Hope House. The execution of the project is the result of the partnership between Strengthen Thy Sister partners and Jennings Hope House to expand ministry outreach. The initial $900.00 was provided in January and the remaining $1,800.00 was provided in February to cover February and March groceries and helped to offset the budget.

This project aligns with Strengthen Thy Sister's Ministry mission by strengthening its impact on the community through partnerships that provide tangible support to community organizations such as Jennings Hope House for homeless students and students facing a family crisis. | |
| Week 13 | April 2022 |

The researcher and Hope House Director will meet to discuss the outcome of the implementation of the ministry outreach expansion project. Week 12 ended the purchase of groceries. The Project Outcome report was submitted to the researcher in April 2022. Appendix K

After convening with Jennings School District and receiving approval to implement the project, the researcher decided that the project participants' meetings via Zoom would be feasible to adhere to the local and national guidance regarding COVID-19 public meeting protocols and social distancing restrictions. Several women and families associated with STS either contracted COVID-19 or died from the virus. Because of the severity of the virus, the ministry prioritized the participants' health and safety. Nevertheless, the virtual meeting format did not impact the execution of the project or its effectiveness. During the project introduction meeting the researcher shared STS's vision for serving the community, the Liberty DMIN program, the JSD initial meeting outcome, the intervention design, and the implementation process. The researcher invited women to participate and shared the recruitment letter and consent to participate form with the participants, detailing the project process, the participant's level of commitment, and the ability to withdraw from the project at any time (Appendix G and H). Fifteen women from the North County and West County areas volunteered to participate in the outreach expansion project and expressed their need and excitement about participating in the project. To protect the project participants' identity, the researcher instituted several ethical safeguards, such as using anonymous pre- and post-questionnaires and securing the information in a locked electronic device that required a password for access.

The project implementation continued with the researcher reviewing and discussing data regarding the COVID-19 crisis and its impact on the community, along with data regarding food insecurity (Figures 1 and 2), food deserts, and homeless students K-12. Next, the attendees

presented questions regarding the project, such as when the project would start and how long it would take to provide the funds for the groceries. They each agreed to contribute an online financial donation of their choice to cover the three-month cost of groceries for both Hope Houses, which totaled $2,700.00 donated in one week. The participants agreed that the outreach expansion project, as outlined, should be executed immediately because of the current crisis and the imperative need within the community.

The next phase included the participants completing an anonymous pre-questionnaire the following week, designed in Google Docs. Once the participants completed the questionnaire, the project implementation process continued with the Strengthen Thy Sister board of directors, project participants, and Jennings Hope House director convening via Zoom. The meeting began with the participants discussing the question presented in the pre-questionnaire, "Who is thy neighbor?" and sharing their interest in serving the community through the outreach project. During this meeting, the Jennings Hope House director presented the Hope House program and explained how it assisted homeless students and families facing a crisis. Dr. Hicks-Prophet presented additional data and facts on homeless students and the impact of homelessness on a student's ability to learn. She also shared the Hope House model, the daily routine of the students, and the immediate and positive impact of the program on students' lives. Additionally, the director shared information regarding Jennings municipality being considered one of many food deserts in Missouri and how families encountered food insecurities there. The meeting attendees again reviewed and discussed national and local data regarding these issues and presented and addressed relevant questions. At the conclusion of the Zoom meeting, STS presented JSD with a $900.00 donation to cover the first month of groceries and confirmed an additional $1,800.00 would be provided in February, ending with a total donation of $2,700.00.

The researcher delivered the $900.00 check on the following day and supplied the remaining amount of $1800.00 at the Jennings School District board meeting in February 2022.

After the project implementation, the participants completed the Google Docs Focus Group Post Questionnaire (Appendix D). The post-questionnaire focused on the participants sharing their experiences following their participation in the outreach expansion project. This process included participants exploring the relevance of the project, STS being poised to respond during a crisis, and how to be proactive when planning for future outreach projects. One participant shared that the project "gave them an opportunity to be a part of a collective effort to help the community." Another participant shared that partaking in the project "provided an awareness of the impact of COVID-19 on marginalized communities." Also, during the post-meeting, the researcher, participants, and community partner proposed ideas for future efforts to continue leveraging ministry and community partnerships.

The Hope House director tracked and submitted the expansion project outcomes that resulted from the project implementation (Appendix K). Dr. Hicks-Prophet shared how the three-month supply of groceries was a "tremendous support" and how the donation helped to address the food insecurity Jennings students face daily. The donation also afforded the organization an opportunity not to spend funds allocated for the maintenance, utilities, and upkeep of both Hope Houses to account for the cost of purchasing healthy food items instead of low-cost, unhealthy, processed food items. This method of reporting outcomes produced clear information and showcased the direct and immediate impact of the implementation of the project during a crisis (Appendix K).

Data Collection

Researching data and information regarding the outreach project functioned as an essential aspect of the partnership and project implementation. Data collection and analysis

created a context for the project and confirmed the impact of COVID-19 in the community, along with the need to be proactive and equipped to perform outreach in the community before, during, and after a crisis. The data also highlighted and confirmed many challenges marginalized and under-resourced communities faced prior to the crisis. Data can and should be used to inform ministries and organizations about the issues that plague communities and to shift their focus from being reactionary to being proactive toward community needs through targeted partnerships.

The researcher's initial data collection and analysis process entailed reviewing local and national data regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, food deserts, food insecurity, and homeless K-12 students. This data was first researched and analyzed by looking for trends in COVID-19 cases nationally and locally, particularly in St. Louis North County. She also followed the impact of the virus on different ethnicities and age groups in addition to the deaths resulting from contracting the virus. Many deaths were due to some communities not having correct and current information, personal protective equipment, testing kits, vaccines, and appropriate health care services. The researcher, some project participants, and the director of Hope House possessed a comprehensive knowledge of the data reports before the project implementation because of their extensive work in healthcare, social work, and educational professions.

Dr. Hicks-Prophet shared the number of homeless students in JSD in the 2021-2022 school year and compared the numbers to other school districts and the impact of homeless students receiving a quality education before the COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher also reviewed data regarding homeless students from The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Missouri Department of Social Services-Children Division and

public databases. Hope House clients were not asked to participate in the project or to provide any personal or identifying information.

The researcher used Google Docs, an online processor, to develop and disseminate the pre-and post-questionnaires utilized in the outreach expansion project. This method allowed the project participants to submit their responses securely and anonymously, with the responses being saved and tabulated in the Google Docs system. Next, the researcher extracted the tabulated pre- and post-questionnaire responses and exported the information into a Microsoft Word document (Appendix I - J). This system allowed the researcher to review and analyze the information in an accurate, organized, and systematic manner. The process also included comparing the similarity of the question responses, focus group, and the participant's overall view of the project purpose. In addition, the researcher developed the project outcomes report in Microsoft Word and transmitted it to the Hope House director for completion. She also implemented charts and graphs to review, analyze and discuss during the focus group.

Next, the researcher reviewed, triangulated, and analyzed data collected from several credible sources. This accumulated data drove the area of focus, produced different perspectives on the outreach project, and provided essential information for understanding the impact of the crisis on the community. Specifically, the data showcased perspectives in four key areas: researcher, project participants, the public, and practitioners. Combining the four perspectives provided different viewpoints regarding the ministry, crisis, and community while showing how outreach ministry can address community needs during a crisis through strategic community partnerships, which established the foundation of the project. The researcher's perspective focused on the overall purpose of the data and how it could be utilized to inform and determine the direction and level of outreach to the community while educating the ministry and others on

the challenges and problems communities face. Before and during the pandemic, STS fellowship meetings incorporated the review and discussion of various community and national topics and data that focused on the importance of the ministry's awareness of the topics and the act of praying for issues that impact the local community and world. The participants' perspective focused on viewing the community as a neighbor and the moral responsibility to support the community and allowing the data to help inform how resources should be directed. This perspective also provided the project with an understanding of those who choose to support the needs of others in a compassionate and informed manner. The practitioner's experienced perspective addressed the educational system and the impact of COVID-19 and food insecurity on this system. Practitioners and experts working within the ministry and marketplace often witness first-hand facts before data is developed and analyzed to confirm problems plaguing communities nationwide. A lived experience perspective also proves critical to the research process and offers solutions for the problem area from those directly impacted. Furthermore, the lived experience supplies a level of knowledge and understanding that the practitioners and partners may lack and need to address the issue accurately and effectively and to develop viable solutions feasibly.

A significant aspect of data collection, theory triangulation must be utilized in order "to use multiple perspectives to interpret a single set of data."[105] Incorporating the perspectives of all sources and parties involved in a project produces a richer and more accurate understanding of the research topic, thus providing diverse and viable solutions to address the matter in the most effective and efficient manner. Sensing says, "No single field of vision is all-inclusive of every

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[105] Tim Sensing. *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 15.

aspect of a vista. The landscape of the research problem is similarly too large, complex, and

dynamic for one snapshot to capture."[106] Thus, incorporating and triangulating the perspective

and voice of the outsider, insider, and researcher offered perspectives that added credibility and

validity to the outreach expansion project while also welcoming other perspectives (Figure 4).
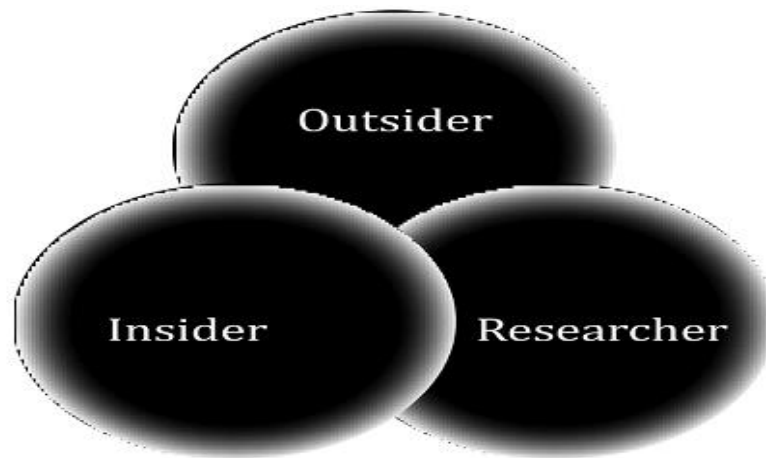

Figure 4: Data Triangulation from Distinct Perspectives
Source: "An Action Project Cycle" diagram. Reprinted from
Tim Sensing, Qualitative *Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to
Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, 75.

Triangulating distinct perspectives also proved to be a valuable exercise that was pivotal to

analyzing and interpreting the overall project results.

Typically, researchers collect and analyze data and often use it to inform, identify trends,

or confirm problems and direct resources. Ministries should intentionally use data to inform and

direct their outreach to the community and to determine strategic partnerships. The demographic

data can reveal general information about the population around a specific ministry that will, in

turn, help the ministry better serve the community based on the facts and needs of the

community.

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[106] Tim Sensing. *A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*. 75.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher continued to review daily reports and data regarding the effects of the pandemic on the community. As stated earlier, this information was shared during the focus group, which prompted significant dialogue about the project. Additionally, the participants and researcher disclosed how they witnessed the impact of the COVID-19 crisis in St. Louis City and St. Louis County by witnessing the long lines of individuals and families at food distribution sites throughout the community. The Urban League, St. Louis Area Food Bank, and Operation Food Search led the charge of conducting massive food distributions throughout the pandemic to help families facing hardship and food insecurity. Also, hundreds of people were seen lined up at local churches, para ministries and organizations throughout Missouri that partnered with local health departments to distribute personal protective equipment and to administer COVID-19 testing and vaccines to help mitigate the spread of the virus. Thus, the extent of the COVID-19 impact witnessed and experienced also confirmed the data retrieved and analyzed during the project.

Finally, after researching and analyzing data, the researcher, project participants, and community partners proposed ideas for future efforts to continue leveraging ministry and community partnerships to address community needs.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Loving one's neighbor as oneself can be demonstrated in various ways. The STS and JSD Hope House outreach expansion project focused on a partnership that fulfilled a specific need in the community in a practical and tangible manner during a crisis. As a result, the STS outreach ministry expansion project provided three months of groceries for JSD Hope Houses, which serve homeless students and students in crisis.

Chapter 4 outlines the project implementation results outlined in Chapter 3 and will be revisited in this chapter. Analyzing the data from local, national, and scholarly reports, pre- and post-questionnaires, focus groups, and project outcomes produced the responses for the Strengthen Thy Sister outreach expansion project. To compute the project results, the researcher tabulated and recorded the results from the pre-and post-questionnaires in the Google Docs application, which allowed the researcher to analyze the data systematically and accurately. Charts and graphs showcased results that can assist with developing, informing, and expanding ministry outreach projects or initiatives through leveraging ministry and community partnerships. With several participants contracting the COVID-19 virus, the post-focus group had to be rescheduled twice, and the final meeting with the Hope House director and researcher occurred via phone conference due to the continuous spread of the COVID-19 virus and the CDC public meeting protocols.

Having made a devastating impact across the globe, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed numerous problems that were prevalent in communities across the nation before the pandemic, one being food insecurities. STS followed local and national data reports that conveyed the effects of the pandemic within the community they served and expanded the outreach ministry

strategically to address an explicit need. The project implementation proved effective because the researcher achieved the outcomes in a targeted, expeditious, and efficient manner due to a partnership with skilled practitioners who had established viable programs to meet a specific exigency.

Prior to implementation, the fifteen participants expressed enthusiasm about participating in the project and their commitment to continuing to expand Strengthen Thy Sister's ministry outreach and volunteering for current and future initiatives within the community. Several themes emerged from the project, which included the importance of leveraging community and ministry partnerships, the purpose of the local church and para ministries and their relationship to each other and the community, community engagement, data, food insecurity, and homeless K-12 students.

Leveraging ministry and community partnerships presents an opportunity for ministries to expand outreach to the community through targeted and strategic methods. Whether a local church or para ministry, both entities can learn how to serve the community from expert practitioners, while the practitioners supply the knowledge, infrastructure, and resources the ministries may lack. The research acknowledges the benefits of both ministry and community organizations partnering in producing a collaborative impact for the betterment of the community. Leveraging partnerships lightens the burden for one entity and employs each partner's area of expertise and resources to fulfill a specific need or several needs within the community. For instance, the project participants shared the importance of leveraging partnerships in the pre-questionnaire. One participant stated, "The more collaboration there is between those in ministry and organizations throughout the entire metropolitan area, which are helping those in need, the wider the influence and awareness of both. The result is combined

efforts with greater resources to meet those needs and the ability to develop best practices." Another participant mentioned that partnerships can be essential if individuals "make a positive, life-long, and sustainable impact in improving lives and communities" (Appendix I). In other words, tackling the various ills that plague the community requires a united front.

Local churches and para ministries coalescing in a strategic and unified approach can produce an opportunity for both to fulfill the Great Commission to the broader community and to generate a more substantial impact locally, nationally, and internationally. During the project's pre-Zoom meeting, the researcher shared Matt 28:16, and the group discussed the importance of the church and para ministries collaborating to fulfill the Great Commission. One participant stated, "Both are comprised of believers in Jesus Christ and should work together when spreading the gospel and helping the community." Another participant disclosed, "Collective efforts can bring about greater impact and farther reach." Ultimately, the church of Jesus Christ encompasses a body of Christian believers, not a particular denomination within a building.

Christ serves as the head of the universal church, and greater feats can be accomplished regarding loving thy neighbor as thyself when Christians submit to the leading of His Holy Spirit to spread the gospel in word and deed. This act requires a willing and coordinated effort of the church and para ministries coacting to impact the area where the ministries are located and beyond. Understanding the body of Jesus Christ is not separate, and each ministry's specific calling serves as a pivotal aspect of collective and effective collaboration. Each ministry can work to support the other by leveraging gifts, talents, and resources to perform outreach in the community. Therefore, the focus must rest on how individuals can collaborate to spread the gospel in word and deed and to serve humanity's needs through partnerships.

Ministries desiring to partner with community organizations begin with community engagement, either focused on an area of interest or based on a need. They must also inform the community of their availability and of their readiness to serve. The driving force behind engagement must be to help advance the lives of those who live within the community and abroad. Ultimately, the strategic planning process is requisite for any ministry to know and to serve the community. Strengthen Thy Sister's board of directors shared, "Strategic planning has assisted the ministry in remaining focused and committed to serving the community." Strategic planning originates with the mission and vision of the ministry and establishes goals related to how the ministry will execute the mission and vision, depending on the ministry's area of focus. The strategic process will also determine who is engaged and how the ministry should be intentional and targeted toward the community. Ministries should engage the community based on the needs of the geographical area where the ministry is located, and the engagement should include experts who can advise the ministry regarding the community and how to best serve the community through outreach and partnerships. Community engagement also examines the inequities within a community and aims to mitigate them by partnering with organizations and governments, whether through local, state, and federal policy changes or by developing and implementing programs that will diminish and eliminate the inequities within the community.

Data aids in determining the specific area of engagement and partnerships, which was JSD Hope House in this case. The project participants reviewed and discussed public demographics and data from several local and national sources, such as the St. Louis County Government, United States Census Bureau, Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, National Alliance on Homelessness, and United States Department of Agriculture, along with data from multiple scholarly reports. The data retrieved from different sources and

viewpoints confirmed the need for the project and directed the scope of the outreach project.

Thus, ministries should use data to direct resources, to inform outreach to the community, and to

develop strategic partnerships.

Using data to inform and to guide the mission and vision of any ministry contributes

significantly to the specific work to which the ministry has been called to serve. Data tells a story

and allows the ministry to witness its impact on the community, both tangible and practical. It

also presents opportunities for new relationships to be established and for resources to be

directed to the ministry and community in a strategic, targeted, and impactful manner.

The STS outreach expansion project partnered with JSD during a crisis to address food

insecurity among students and families within a community characterized as a food desert. The

partnership afforded the ministry an opportunity to learn from educational professionals how the

COVID-19 pandemic directly impacted homeless K-12 students in JSD. During the 2021-2022

school year, the student enrollment of Jennings totaled 2,498, of which 290 or 11% of the

students were considered homeless. JSD understood the relevance of how students having stable

housing and nutritional meals is vital to a student's well-being and academic performance.

Specifically, the Hope House program focuses on homeless students and families facing a crisis.

As a result, the project participants analyzed and discussed data from several sources, such as the

2021 USDA Economic Research Service report, which stated 5.0 million children lived in food-

insecure households. The theoretical section of the thesis discussed this data in detail.

Understanding how food deserts and food insecurity occur was instrumental in providing

solutions to mitigate the problem. This discussion occurred during the focus group, and one

participant who lived in Jennings shared she was unaware of "how prevalent it was in Jennings

based on the data and information shared by the researcher and director of Hope House." The

data assessed in this study confirmed the prevalence of food insecurity within communities locally and nationally, as well as its impact on families. In 2021, the prevalence of food insecurity varied considerably among household types. Rates of food insecurity were higher than the national average of 10.2 percent for all households with children, which was 12.5 percent (Figure 1).

To launch the project, the Strengthen Thy Sister leadership and participants discussed how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted communities across the nation and within St. Louis, Missouri, during the pre-focus group. The results from the participants' pre- and post-questionnaires and focus group revealed the participants' perspectives regarding ministry and community partnerships directed toward an explicit need. Participants shared specific areas of service such as "senior care, giving to clothing drives, providing financial literacy classes, policy development and veteran services" (Appendix I).

 Multiple women who attended STS had been significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, either by contracting the virus, loss of employment, or loss of loved ones because of the virus, and its direct impact on their immediate neighborhood, thus producing a greater level of compassion, empathy, and desire to help their neighbors and community. All fifteen participants expressed a deep passion for participating in the project and agreed that the community was their neighbor and they each had an obligation to serve and to give back to their community.

The researcher and participants reviewed and discussed national and local reports and data regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, health disparities, food deserts, food insecurity, and homeless K-12 students and how the pandemic impacted communities, particularly St. Louis North County. Next, the STS leadership partnered with an agency within the community to

provide support during the crisis. Minister Mayfield convened with Dr. Knight and Dr. Hicks-Prophet to share the DMIN project requirements and Strengthen Thy Sister's vision of expanding the ministry outreach with JSD's participation in the DMIN project. In addition, Minister Mayfield shared the purpose of expanding the ministry's outreach to the community through partnering with JSD to address the food insecurity dilemma within the school district by sponsoring meals for Hope House students. This meeting also involved a discussion of the implementation plan, specifically the best practices to implement the project within the following three months and the expected outcomes of the project implementation.

Prior to the execution phase of the project, the researcher, STS, Jennings School District, and the participants attended an initial informational meeting about the project, which included presenting the purpose of the project, an overview of the initial meeting with Jennings School District, and how the project would address an immediate need in the community during the COVID-19 crisis. The researcher again shared data regarding the COVID-19 pandemic both nationally and locally. In addition, the director of Hope of House presented and discussed the history and purpose of the organization and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Jennings School District and its community.

The project implementation allowed STS to assist up to fourteen families with a three-month supply of groceries in the amount of $2,700.00, which specifically focused on healthy food items instead of low-cost, unhealthy, processed food items. Having access to affordable, healthy food choices benefits the overall health of all humans, particularly children. The donation not only assisted with the increasing cost of groceries but also prevented both Hope Houses from expending funds allocated for the maintenance, utilities, and upkeep of the facilities. More importantly, it allowed STS to demonstrate Christ's love in a targeted,

collaborative, practical, and tangible manner. The project also created a potential pathway for the ministry to partner with JSD to support future outreach initiatives for other JSD projects.

The pre-questionnaire proposed several questions, and the first question focused on the nature of the project: "Who do you consider your neighbor to be according to Matt 22:39 in the context of community" (Appendix C). All fifteen participants agreed that their neighbor was anyone they encountered daily or anyone who had a need, whether within immediate proximity or at large, and expressed their willingness to contribute to and serve the need (Appendix I). After the participants completed the pre-questionnaire, the focus group discussion allowed the researchers and participants to share their thoughts on the passages in Phil 2:4 and Matt 22:37-40. The participants discussed how sometimes people can become so consumed with their own needs that they cannot see beyond themselves to discern the needs or pain of others. In addition, the participants disclosed how personal biases can blind someone to the needs of others and cause them to walk past others, as both priests did in the parable of the Good Samaritan. The priests' racial hatred toward Samaritans caused them to disregard the human being who was lying in the road injured, failing to apprehend they could be lying in the road themselves one day, needing the help of the Samaritan. Because of such biases, priests who were expected to represent God to the people became a misrepresentation of God through their neglect to help the injured man. One participant cited Heb 13:1, which states, "Keep on loving one another as your brothers and sisters showing hospitality to strangers." Clark's commentary on this verse says, "As God is remarkable for his philanthropy, or love to man, so should they be for philanthropy or love to each other."[107] God has been and continues to be gracious toward His children through His love and kindness; therefore, His children must be continuously gracious to others.

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[107] "Hebrews 13," Clarke's Commentary, accessed July 5, 2023, https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/acc/hebrews-13.html.

Additionally, some participants spoke not only about the biases of the priests in the Bible but also about the systemic biases magnified throughout the nation during the COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher and two participants shared how numerous marginalized communities experienced higher rates of deaths and a rapid spread of the virus due to resources such as personal protective equipment, tests, and vaccines being unavailable or distributed inequitably. One healthcare executive participant stated, "The COVID-19 test and vaccines were distributed first to more influent zip codes rather than those zip codes that were experiencing infections and deaths at a disproportionately higher rate." Other participants also discussed the difficulty of locating tests and vaccines in their neighborhood, which resulted in them driving miles away from their community to access them. The local and world news also reported these observations during the COVID-19 pandemic, confirming the participants' observations and comments.

The results of participants' responses to whether they "participated in community service projects within the last year" showed that fourteen of the fifteen participants had an invested interest in serving their community. This finding was based on the community service projects they had participated in within the last year (Figure 5). The question specifically asked, "have you participated in a community service project within the last year?" Fourteen of the fifteen participants responded "yes" to participating in community service projects, and one did not. One participant's oversight of the question did not impact the overall responses. The responses revealed how engaged the participants were and their commitment to serving the community.
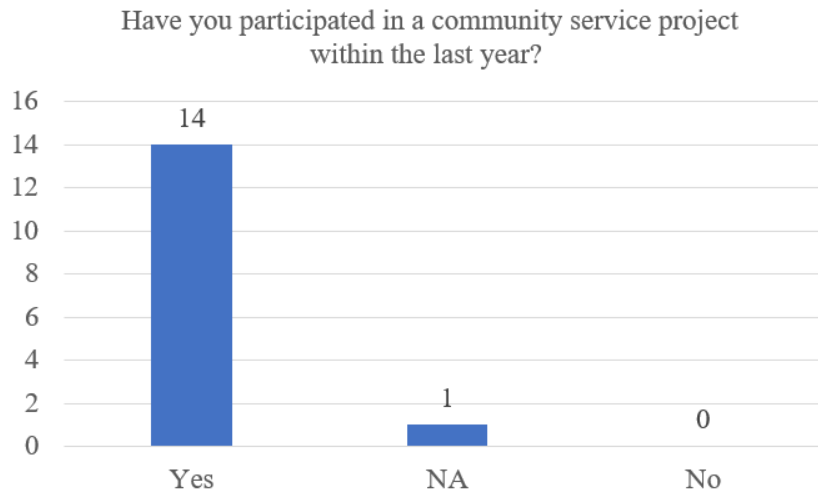
Figure 5: Participation in a community service
project within the last year.

The follow-up question asked the participants to "check the specific area of service",

highlighting the diverse areas of interest and the areas in which the participants had served

within the past year (Figure 6). The responses covered a broad spectrum, which included (five)

participants working with the homeless. The remaining responses included eleven participants

engaging in the following community service projects: youth organizations (six), STS (three),

clothing donation (one), and working with young women (one). In addition, the participants'

responses and focus group discussion revealed their extensive knowledge and understanding

regarding some areas of need in the community and the responsibility to assist with those needs.

Those areas include but are not limited to, affordable housing, affordable healthcare, substance

abuse programs, mental health, employment programs, viable grocery stores in food deserts,

transportation, mentorship programs for women of color, housing for youth, senior

transportation, accessible sidewalks, spiritual outreach, veteran assistance programs, economic

development, gun violence, and domestic violence. The responses to the question showcased the

breadth of experience and knowledge the participants possessed regarding their community and

willingness to serve. It also revealed the participants' commitment to giving back to the

community and how individuals can show love to their neighbors. One participant shared,

"When we give back to others, we are showing that we truly care; it's just that simple." Another

shared that "we must be willing to look beyond our needs and seek to help others even in a

crisis."
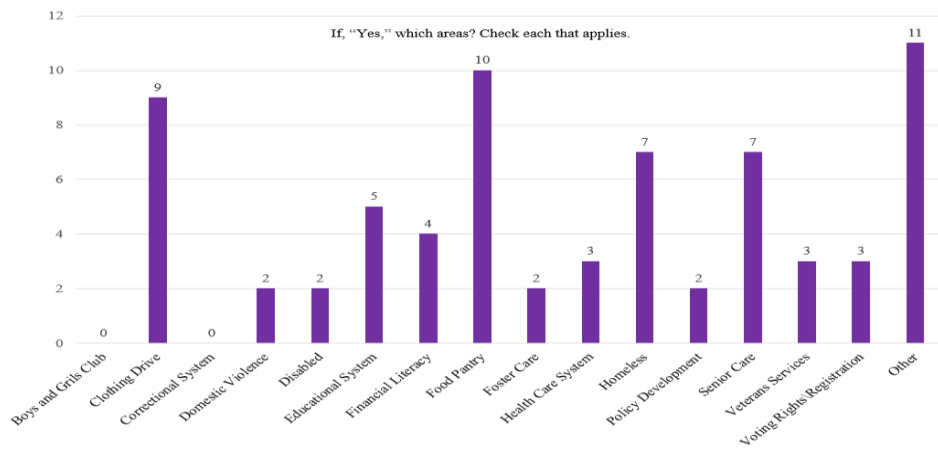
Figure 6: Participant Pre-Questionnaire

When responding to the participant pre-questionnaire, participants shared the significance

of ministries embracing an outward focus by partnering with community organizations to address

community needs. One participant noted that partnerships are critical "if we are to make a

positive, lifelong, and sustainable impact in improving lives and communities." Another

participant stated, "the more collaboration there is between those in ministry and organizations

throughout the entire metropolitan area, which are helping those in need, the wider the influence

and awareness of both. The result is combined efforts with greater resources to meet those needs

and the ability to develop best practices" (Table 2). Partnerships are also important because

addressing the needs of the community requires collective knowledge, perspectives, experience,

and resources. Each partner must leverage their resources to fulfill the ministry and

organization's mission for the betterment of the community. The objective involves improving

the quality of life for those who are marginalized and lack the resources needed to stabilize their

lives and communities.

Table 2: Participants' views of the importance of ministry and community partnerships.

Participants	Responses
1	Ministry and community partnerships are needed to help resolve many issues that plague our communities.
2	Very important; especially the involvement of my church in collecting food (Thanksgiving and/or Christmas Dinner), our church food pantry, back-to-school supplies for children, and/or monetary donations to children's organizations (St. Jude).
3	It is extremely critical because we as the Church in community are the gifts, light, hands & tools of resources that God uses in the community to provide & serve the needs of the people.
4	Critical if we are to make a positive, lifelong, and sustainable impact in improving lives and communities.
5	It takes all of us to help our communities survive, especially our children.
6	God's word states that we should help and support those who are in need.
7	The more collaboration there is between those in ministry and organizations throughout the entire metropolitan area, which are helping those in need, the wider the influence and awareness of both. The result is combined efforts with greater resources to meet those needs and the ability to develop best practices.
8	This is very important because it takes a village, and both working together can help address community needs. It also opens the door to sharing the Gospel.
9	Ministry outreach and partnerships, like the one with Jennings School District, are vital to supporting under-resourced communities.
10	I believe it's critical for ministry and community organizations to collaborate to address the needs of the community so that both can work together.
11	Vital because it gives ministries the opportunity to know the community they serve and to share the Gospel while meeting needs.
12	It is very important to me that both ministry and community organizations build great partnerships to help accommodate the concerns and needs of the community. By doing so, there can be a decline in the deficiencies that are currently present.
13	Extremely important. It's a part of our purpose for being on this earth to work together to address spiritual and social needs.
14	It is particularly important because this is a way that the ministry and community can stay connected to each other and for the community to have an avenue/resource to the ministry.

15	Ministry and community partnerships are extremely important and vital. We are called as Christians to be concerned with and to serve the communities that God has called us to. It provides an opportunity to develop relationships that can open the door to sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed.

The participants also disclosed the importance of ministry and community partnerships (Table 2). Collectively, the participants agreed that community engagement and building relationships are critical to ministry outreach. One participant shared, "I believe it's critical for ministry and community organizations to collaborate to address the needs of the community so that both can work together." Another participant responded that the importance of ministry and community partnerships is "vital because it gives the ministry an opportunity to know the community they serve and to share the Gospel while meeting a need." The church is called as Christians to be concerned with and to serve the communities to which God has called them. It provides an opportunity to develop relationships that can open the door to sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed. Another participant stated, "We as the Church in the community are the gifts, light, hands & resources that God uses in the community to provide & serve the needs of the people." Overall, the participants' responses conveyed their individual and collective commitment to serving the community and the cruciality of partnerships when acknowledging and fulfilling the community's needs. The discussion also set the tone for the implementation of the project. Everyone operated in one accord and understood the urgency of executing the project according to the design and in an efficient manner. The group's focus and passion entailed demonstrating Christ's love in word and deed.

Because of STS's organized efforts and partnership with JSD Hope House, the ministry outreach expansion project proved to be effectual and provided immediate results and outcomes without hindrance during a community crisis. The following section explores the outcomes

produced because of the project implementation as recorded and submitted by the Hope House director. The objective of this project involved meeting an immediate need during a crisis that would assist JSD with enhancing the quality of life for the students and families of Hope House. Access to healthy food is pivotal to the health and development of children. Thus, deciding if and what children will eat daily should not be the responsibility of students nor a worry for the parents.

<div style="text-align:center">Hope House Project Outcomes</div>

Measuring the effectiveness and immediate impact of the project implementation served as an essential component of the project design. The resources for the work of a ministry should align with the mission and vision of the ministry. Seeing the mission and vision beyond words demonstrates the ministry's focus on the community and its willingness to serve the needs of its neighbors. The project design included five questions directed toward the outreach expansion project outcomes (Appendix E). The researcher submitted these questions to the director of Hope House at the beginning of the implementation process with instructions to document the project outcomes and to provide a report two weeks after the project concluded. To assess the project outcome report, the researcher and director conducted a phone conference to review each question. Both homes served up to fourteen individuals, and they served 392 meals weekly, which included nutritious breakfast, lunch, dinner, and healthy snacks. Because of the increasing cost of groceries, the generous donation assisted the organization in continuing to supply its children with healthy food and snacks (Appendix K).

Following the completion of the project, Dr. Hicks-Prophet, the director of Hope House, shared how the three-month supply of groceries was a "tremendous support" and how the donation helped to address the food insecurity Jennings students face daily. The donation also

allowed the organization not to spend funds allocated for the maintenance, utilities, and upkeep of both Hope Houses to account for the cost of purchasing healthy food items instead of low-cost, unhealthy, processed food items. During the phone conference, the director also expounded on the challenges that the organization sometimes faces with the cost of upkeep and maintenance for the two homes.[108] Normally, organizations and neighbors within the community donate their time and resources for minor repairs and landscaping to alleviate the financial burden.

The results also showcased how ministries and organizations can collaborate on future outreach projects with Jennings Hope House, such as attending meetings, activities, and functions that support the work and mission of Hope House. Ministries can also continue forming partnerships to help supply items needed for the operation of Hope House, including clothing, cleaning and laundry supplies, educational books, chaperones for special events, and tutoring, and invite others to do the same. Finally, the director shared:

> Years of studies focused on the benefits of improving the health of students have shown that nutrition can have a positive influence on student learning and behavior. This project also brought attention to the ongoing support we provide our students and families through our wraparound service initiatives, such as the two Hope Houses, two full-service on-site health centers, a food bank, washing machines in each school, and a grocery store on-site at one of our elementary schools. Our students deserve the best–quality education, a safe and functional home environment, and a healthy mind and body. Jennings School District ultimate goal is for every student to become productive citizens and prepared to compete on a local and global level in a career of their own choosing. Organizations, like Strengthen Thy Sister, is making our mission possible to serve the whole child in an effective and efficient manner (Appendix E).

Additionally, the researcher shared the project outcomes with the participants during the post project focus group, which focused on four specific questions regarding the completion of the project and how the participants could support future outreach efforts that address community needs. Each participant disclosed why they chose to participate in the project. One participant

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108 Dr. Vernice Hicks-Prophet, Interview Conversation. April 19, 2022.

expressed the relevance of "sharing their opinion and to demonstrate the importance of collaboration between church, ministries and the community." Another participant shared, "Participating in the project provided an opportunity to learn about several disparities within the community and across the nation," particularly health, healthcare, and economic and educational disparities among African Americans and how it was magnified during the COVID-19 pandemic. Extensive discussions on health and healthcare disparities occurred throughout the project due to the number of deaths being reported locally and nationally due to the COVID-19 virus, specifically among African Americans. Several participants mentioned how they would be intentional about engaging the community before a crisis and seek opportunities to give back to the community by donating resources and time to organizations. All the participants agreed on the significance of supporting ministry efforts within the local church and para ministries' outreach to the community.

Participants also discussed the knowledge they possessed regarding the outreach project area of focus prior to their participation and how it had been an enriching experience to participate in the project. According to the individual responses, fourteen of the fifteen participants had some knowledge of the food desert and food insecurity in Jennings, and in the nation abroad, while one participant shared how they were unaware of these issues and their impact on the community until the COVID-19 crisis emerged. Other participants revealed that working in the marketplace had provided them with an opportunity to connect to the community and to learn about issues plaguing the community and how to address them. Ultimately, serving the needs of the community through partnerships affords ministries an opportunity to share the gospel in word and deed and allows the community to witness the body of Christ in action.

The results of the outreach expansion project again validated the project and illustrated the need for strategic partnerships between ministries and community organizations to address community needs. It also demonstrated the immediate impact that targeted outreach can have when individuals care enough to stop and to examine the needs of others and therefore respond in an immediate, compassionate, practical, and tangible manner, like the Good Samaritan.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Research Implications

Leveraging ministry and community partnerships presents an opportunity for ministries to expand outreach ministry to the community in a targeted and strategic manner. Both local churches and para ministries abroad can learn from expert practitioners how to serve the community and acquire the knowledge, infrastructure, and resources ministries may lack. Ministry must be more than a place to receive the gospel message; the message and outreach must reach the community effectually. Throughout history, changes within local communities have supported the impact of ministries at work within those communities. Caring for others is essential to spreading the gospel, which must be witnessed in word and deed. There must be an outward focus that seeks to uplift humanity regardless of race, ethnicity, or economic and social status to create significant change. Seeking to serve the interest of others displays a love that is not predicated on what an individual believes or can give but instead on recognizing a human need and acting on it with empathy and compassion. Knowing the needs of others requires a genuine effort and intentionality that moves a ministry from its comfort zone and sometimes beyond its resources and abilities, which explains the significance of leveraging ministry and community partnerships to address community needs. Leveraging partnerships alleviates the burden from one entity and employs each partner's area of expertise and resources to address a specific need, as with the JSD and STS partnership. Specifically, the ministry area of focus typically determines partnerships within the community. Whether within a local congregation or within a para ministry, God never called the Body of Christ to work in silos, as working together proves to be essential to reaching the community where one is planted.

The project implementation resulting from the JSD and STS partnership acknowledged the benefits of both ministry and community organizations partnering in accomplishing collaborative impact for the betterment of the community. As evidenced in F.B. Meyer's commentary on loving thy neighbor, seeking those who need help showcases intentionality about empathizing with the needs of others and acquiring the necessary resources to fulfill such needs.[109] The creation of the JSD and STS partnership focused on leveraging resources to meet a need in the community during the COVID-19 pandemic, as its framework aligned with addressing the identified need in a targeted, expedient, and efficient manner.

Additionally, community organizations and agencies offer ministries avenues to engage the community and work together to address community needs. If time had permitted, the researcher would have solicited other ministries beyond the two contacted to participate in the project to produce a greater impact and to supply more resources. Extending and building relationships among the believers and community is essential to outreach to the community. In Joe Daniels's article, "Your Church is Your Congregation," he states, "The challenge for most people is building authentic relationships that are mutually beneficial — relationships that build community vitality. People need to learn how to forge new relationships that can be cultivated in a way that brings positive community change."[110] Whether outreach ministry originates from a local church, a para ministry, or the marketplace, forging authentic relationships proves to be critical to building strategic partnerships.

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[109] F. B. Meyer, "F. B. Meyer's 'Through the Bible' Commentary: Luke 10," accessed March 1, 2023, https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/fbm/luke-10.html.

[110] Joe Daniels. "Your Community is Your Congregation." Lewis Center for Church Leadership. Accessed March 16, 2023. https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/yourcommunity-is-your-congregation.

Consistent with previous research upon which this project was conceived, effective

community engagement results from employing various strategies and resources to build trust

within the community to establish a lasting impact.[111] The objective is continuously engaging the

community, building on vetted and trusted relationships, and developing new ones. This

engagement must also extend beyond the ministry's denomination and focus on the concept of

God so loved the world. For instance, STS's outreach to the community has remained focused on

collaborating with agencies regardless of the geographical area and does not require that the

organizations possess a biblical belief, as God requires that Christians show the love of Christ to

humanity. Ministries can miss blessed opportunities to serve the needs of humanity when they

require the recipient of their help to believe in the doctrines of the Christian faith. The focus must

be to seize the opportunity to partner with other experienced, gifted, and skilled practitioners

who provide knowledge to help understand what is needed to meet an immediate need before or

amid a community crisis. This can be done without compromising the ministry's beliefs.

Skjegstad's book *Creative Models to Community Ministry* highlights the importance of

"partnering with gifted individuals to provide solutions rather than just focusing on the

problem."[112] JSD's gifted leadership and staff have always been skillful and proactive in

providing solutions for the problems the school district faces daily. The project participants also

contributed a high level of skills and gifts, providing a perspective vital to understanding what it

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[111] "What Is Community Engagement?" Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences, Department of Agricultural Economics, Sociology, and Education, accessed September 13, 2021, https://aese.psu.edu/research/centers/cecd/engagement-toolbox/engagement/what-is-community-engagement/.

[112] 112 Joy Skjegstad, *7 Creative Models to Community Ministry* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2013), 9.

means to love their neighbor and putting their beliefs about performing outreach to the community into action.

Strengthening Thy Sister's community outreach focuses on connecting with community organizations to develop strategic partnerships to address and support community needs. Their yearly strategic planning process involves proposing a plan to provide outreach to the local community based on their mission and vision. According to Malphurs, leaders who think strategically begin with their mission and vision to determine the direction in which the ministry should go.[113] Thus, the strategic planning process for STS aligned with the DMIN criteria requiring the project to be conducted in a current and local ministry setting and to address an area of expansion for the ministry. Compared to previous research studies and existing literature, this project continued in the vein in which para ministries are designed to partner with community organizations to support the work of the ministry in the local church and world.[114] Understanding the ministry of the universal church is not necessarily undertaken by a specific denomination or institution but executed by believers in Jesus Christ served as a critical component of the strategy implemented in the STS and JSD partnership, allowing both ministry and community organizations to serve together to address a need in the community. Some Christians believe the work of the kingdom is confined to a denomination and a local assembly and must be delimited to partnering only with other Christian organizations. This viewpoint

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[113] Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: A 21st-Century Model for Church and Ministry Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 105.

[114] John Pellowe, "Church/Parachurch Relations: The Body of Christ at Work," Lausanne World Pulse Archives, August 2007, accessed March 14, 2020, https://lausanneworldpulse.com/perspectives-php/767/08-2007.

limits believers' opportunities to labor within the vineyard, utilizing the multitude of gifts and talents they possess to serve humanity while sharing the message of Jesus Christ.

The successful outcomes reported by the Hope House director as a result of the partnership confirmed the effectiveness of the project implementation. These outcomes fulfilled the project's aim of creating an immediate response and impact during a crisis. The participants' perspectives about who they considered a neighbor to be and their swift provision of resources based on their neighbors' needs helped the project achieve its goals according to the project framework.

The outreach expansion project addressed the need identified in the data regarding food insecurity, and food deserts within JSD located in the Jennings municipality. While one ministry may not be able to address the needs in the community, both the local church and para ministries collaborating can help expand outreach to their local community and beyond.[115] STS partnering with JSD to sponsor groceries for Hope House during the COVID-19 pandemic alleviated the burden of Hope House vacillating between purchasing healthier food options or covering maintenance costs with their limited budget. With generous donations from the project participants and STS, the STS ministry assisted Hope House with providing healthy food for homeless students and families facing crisis for three months. This collaboration allowed STS to perform and to expand outreach ministry to the community in a strategic, practical, and tangible manner.

Based on the results of this project, Christians must be receptive to the opportunities God places before them to serve their communities in every sector of the marketplace as multiple men

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[115] John Pellowe, "Church/Parachurch Relations: The Body of Christ at Work," Lausanne World Pulse Archives, August 2007, accessed March 14, 2020, https://lausanneworldpulse.com/perspectives-php/767/08-2007.

and women did in the Bible. As evidenced in the New and Old Testaments, scripture contains numerous unlikely relationships and partnerships God used to fulfill His purpose. God divinely used the pagan King Cirus to provide support to Nehemiah for the rebuilding of the walls in Jerusalem after they were destroyed during the Babylonian captivity (Ezra 1:1-4). He also used Rehab, a gentile prostitute, to save the Israelite spies (Jos 2:4). Because of their narrow vision of who they consider their neighbor to be and whom they should help, ministries often miss the opportunity to work alongside others than can be a blessing to the ministry as well through partnership.

As previously mentioned, the need to serve communities where ministries are planted is essential to fulfilling the work of the ministry. However, the work must not be limited to a geographical area, as it serves as only a starting point. With national and international communities suffering spiritually and socially, the universal church of Jesus Christ commands the power and ability to minister to the needs of the community and world in a united, strategic, tangible, and practical method through collaboration and partnerships. For instance, crises and catastrophes that destroy communities and displace citizens occur across the nation daily, and several ministries have stepped forward to serve in the name of Jesus Christ. Para ministries like Samaritan's Purse work with local partners, organizations, and churches to provide strategic help on the ground in war-torn Ukraine.[116] They have also provided support and relief during the 2023 Maui fire disaster, serving as the body of Christ.[117] Again, the church of Jesus Christ is not a building or specific denomination, nor is the church limited to a geographical area. The church

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[116] Samaritans Purse, "Our Ministry," accessed August 18, 2023, https://www.samaritanspurse.org/our-ministry/ukraine-response/.

[117] Sarmatian Purse, "Airlifting Supplies to Maui," accessed August 17, 2023, https://www.samaritanspurse.org/article/airlifting-relief-supplies-to-maui.

entails the body of believers in Jesus Christ, and wherever a body of believers dwells, there exists an opportunity to minister to the needs of humanity in word and deed. Outreach ministry must be executed in an informed, organized, strategic, and best-practices manner by those willing to serve and work with skilled and experienced persons or groups.

Whether a local church or para ministry, the body of Christ carries a spiritual and moral obligation to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed collectively. Operating in a unified manner will produce a greater collective impact when addressing needs within the community. For instance, churches and para ministries could be proactive in establishing a community outreach coalition that partners with the emergency response systems and community agencies to address needs within the community before and during a crisis. Collaborating with systems that have the requisite infrastructure and best practices in place allows each entity to provide the resources and skills needed to address community needs in a strategic and targeted manner. Ministries could also invite expert practitioners to provide education, data, and necessary resources to the ministry regarding a specific area of outreach.

Research Applications

Through partnerships that build relationships, the Strengthen Thy Sister outreach ministry project framework can be implemented in any local church or para ministry outreach ministry seeking to address a specific need or several needs within its community. The simple project design and implementation process allows ministries to customize and replicate them easily to fit the specific needs of a particular partnership. Community organizations can also reference and utilize the framework to initiate partnerships with ministries that align with the mission and work of the organization regarding outreach to the community.

Another research application would be that a ministry's mission, external focus, and capacity to meet a need will determine the specific area of outreach for organizations. For instance, several opportunities exist for ministries to partner with the community to support specific needs, such as economic development, affordable housing, digital divide, food pantries, homeless individuals, youth, veterans, seniors, health education, public policy, voter registration, domestic violence, substance abuse, and justice system involved persons. Also, many individuals serving within a local church or ministry are educated and gifted in specific areas that can assist local organizations in fulfilling their mission, such as spiritual and educational classes, financial literacy, professional counseling, tutoring, science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics along with serving on commissions and boards within the community. Whatever skill or area of expertise the ministry possesses creates an opportunity for the ministry to serve and give back to the community. Therefore, each individual or collective ministry outreach effort should assess its geographical area and determine its need and the ministry's capacity to fulfill it. Ministry should also seek to serve the world through missions and connecting with ministries and organizations that have established partnerships, infrastructure, and resources to meet and address the needs of humanity.

A third application would be that ministries can also move beyond their zip code and seek ways to foster relationships and partnerships with other local churches, ministries, and organizations to address the needs outside of their immediate community and connect with the broader community. Ministries can adopt specific zip code areas and connect with leaders and organizations in that area to address a specific need.

Building on current initiatives and launching new initiatives in the community serves as a promising starting point for ministries, particularly in marginalized and rural areas that lack

resources and support. The digital divide in many marginalized and rural communities provides

an opportunity for ministries to partner with organizations to provide laptops, internet access,

and digital literacy. With extremely prevalent food insecurity in rural areas, ministries and

organizations can also collaborate to address this issue. According to Rural Health Information

HUB, "Gaining access to healthy and affordable food can be a challenge for rural residents.

Many rural areas lack food retailers and are considered food deserts: areas with limited supplies

of fresh, affordable foods. Ironically, some of these food deserts are in areas where farming is

important to the local economy."[118] Urban and rural ministries and organizations can work

together to build viable grocery stores or start a mobile food pantry and transport food and meals

to rural areas throughout the year. They can also work with local farmers to provide affordable

and nutritious food to the community. Inner city ministries can partner with rural area ministries

to provide after-school and weekend care packets for students. Both can engineer a long-term

commitment to fulfilling a community need through strategic outreach. Partnerships can also be

established to assist the needs of seniors, whether it be providing nutritious meals or support with

purchasing medication by partnering with local pharmacies and providing prepaid gift cards to

cover seniors' monthly prescription bills. There are also established organizations within the

community that assist with canceling medical debt, and this provides outreach ministries an

opportunity to provide financial support.

Addressing the significant lack of affordable housing presents another area of opportunity

for ministries to develop partnerships with organizations that possess the funding, infrastructure,

and resources to assist with building affordable housing. Burns discloses, "Many areas in the

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[118] "Rural Hunger and Access to Healthy Food Overview," Rural Health Information Hub, last modified January 18, 2022, https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/topics/food-and-hunger.

U.S. currently face an affordable housing crisis. Due to recent legislative changes, a quarter million fewer affordable housing units will be built over the coming decade, exacerbating the housing shortage."[119] This type of strategic partnership helps to fulfill a need in the community while also generating income for the ministry and expanding the ministry's outreach to the community. Burns further states, "A successful collaboration between a faith-based organization and private developer, either for profit or not-for-profit, should yield a new complex that is a credit to the community and give the faith-based organization long-term financial benefit."[120] Thus, ministries must become innovative in how they operate and connect to the broader community, as operating in silos is not beneficial for any ministry.

Reaching the communities where they serve requires ministries to model spreading the gospel in an ingenious way that connects to their communities. Just as Jesus moved about within the community and connected with the people, ministries must do the same.

Research Limitation

The limitation of the project implementation resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) enacted COVID-19 public gathering protocols to minimize the spread of the COVID-19 virus. This prevented the project participants from meeting in person; however, it did not affect the validity of the project. Also, the limitation did not impede the project's implementation, completion and submission of questionnaires, contribution of resources and project outcomes. The limitation instead provided an opportunity

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[119] Richard Burns, *Putting Faith in Housing: A Primer for All Partners* (New York: The NHP Foundation, 2018), accessed September 19, 2023. https://nhpfoundation.org/documents/NHPF_FaithBasedAffordableHousing_Articles.pdf.

[120] Ibid., 1.

for the ministry to implement and expand its virtual reach and to open doors for the ministry to connect with the broader community during a crisis and beyond.

Further Research

Additional research on leveraging ministry and community partnerships to meet community needs is recommended to showcase the benefits of collaboration between ministries and community organizations with the goal of producing a targeted, equitable, and collective impact. Research that focuses on the collective impact that results from ministries working with the community, and vice versa, to address the ills and disparities of the community is vital for both entities to connect and to serve. In all, outreach ministry can be accomplished with local, national, and international ministries, agencies, and partners collaborating to address a relevant, specific issue that will generate change in the community and world.

This project can help ministries identify ways to connect to their communities and to acquire insight into some challenges that communities face. It can be implemented in any geographical area and tailored to fit a specific need. While this project focused on St. Louis North County to fulfill the DMIN criteria requirement that the project be local and in the current ministry setting, it can be customized and implemented outside of the United States, even in other countries like those in Africa and Europe. Severe droughts and high food prices primarily cause food insecurity in Africa. Similarly, climate change and the war in Ukraine have triggered food insecurities in Europe. Para ministries like Samaritan's Purse have been instrumental in assisting these countries. To make a greater impact, churches and para ministries in the United States can partner with international ministries to address global crises.

Anywhere a ministry identifies a need to uplift humanity, particularly when meeting humanity's basic needs, becomes a place to sow seeds of love and good deeds. The focus is to reach as far as one can to help a neighbor through partnerships. Thus, any ministry that is passionate about connecting with the broader community through partnerships can customize and implement the outreach expansion framework presented in this study.

Furthermore, additional research is needed to examine the benefits of ministries utilizing data to direct resources and targeted outreach to address community needs. Researching data and information regarding the outreach project was essential to the partnership and project implementation. Data collection created a context for the project and confirmed the impact of COVID-19 and food insecurity within the community and the need to be proactive and prepared to perform outreach in the community during a crisis. The data also confirmed some challenges many communities faced before the crisis and how critical it is to plan and be proactive when addressing community needs. As discussed in Chapter 3, data can help inform ministries and organizations about the issues that plague communities and shift their focus from being reactionary to being proactive toward community needs through partnerships. Partnering with agencies that can provide current data related to community-based needs is essential to driving solutions to address the most imperative needs of a community through collaborative outreach ministry. Additional research can also explore how ministries can collaborate to impact their communities in a unified manner rather than in silos. Such research would address the following question: What would happen if ministries in a specific geographical area worked together to survey the land and partnered with community organizations to address a specific or several community needs?

The Strengthen Thy Sister outreach expansion project demonstrated the gospel in word and deed in a tangible, practical, and efficient manner. Partnering with Jennings School District provided the ministry an opportunity to fulfill a need and to serve its community during a crisis for several months while extending strategic outreach ministry to other organizations like Marion Middle, a faith-based girls' school, and Keyway Center for Diversion and Reentry, an organization that provides support for women reentering the community from the justice system.

Several organizations within the community have partnered with JSD to fulfill Hope House's mission, which can potentially provide STS an opportunity to connect with organizations committed to strengthening the community through strategic partnerships focused on producing targeted collective impact. Some of the organizations include Operation Food Search, which provides affordable and nutritional food to the community, particularly impoverished and marginalized communities. The school district also partners with the Washington University School of Medicine, which provides free in-house medical clinics for students. These partnerships offer an opportunity for STS to provide monetary donations to purchase and supply nutritional food or basic medical supplies for the clinic.

Overall, collaborating with and perceiving all of humanity as a neighbor is pivotal to the mission and vision of ministries. It is also imperative for ministries to look outward and to partner with other organizations with the experience, knowledge, skill, capacity, and best practices to address the community issues ministries lack the capacity to address. When ministries intentionally develop and expand outreach to the community based on the needs of the community, this act opens doors of opportunity to share the gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed putting action to what Christians believe. Leveraging ministry and community partnerships to address community needs yields collective impact for the good of humanity, thy neighbor.

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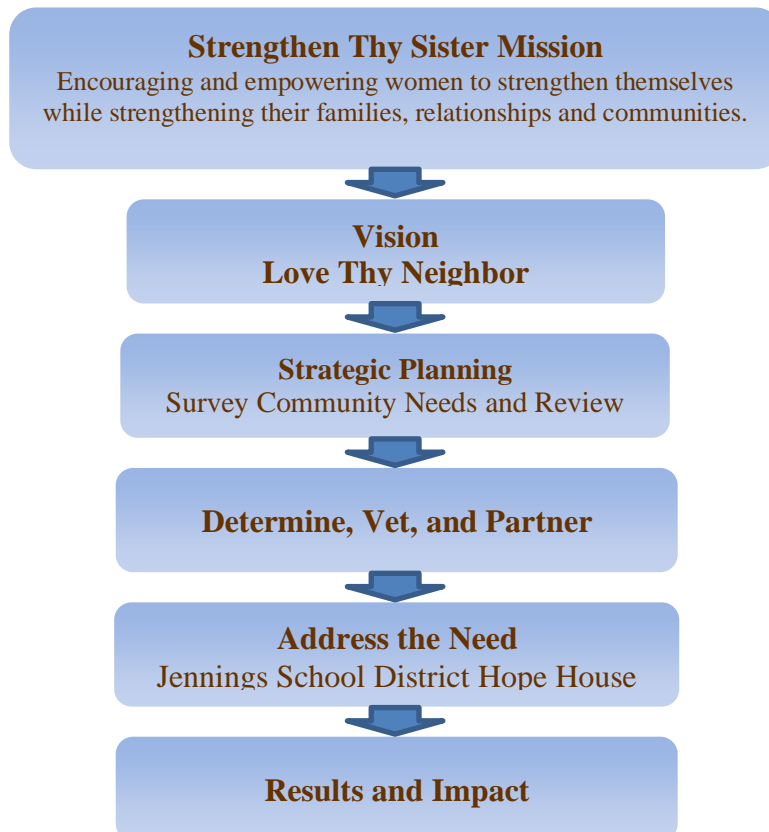
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APPENDIX A

Intervention Design

This DMIN project aims to expand the ministry impact of Strengthen Thy Sister by continuing to leverage ministry and community organization partnerships to address community needs. Such a partnership will be established between Strengthen Thy Sister Ministry partners and Jennings School District Hope House for homeless students and students facing a family crisis. Strengthen Thy Sister will provide groceries to Hope House for three months. This partnership will give Strengthen Thy Sister Ministry the opportunity to demonstrate the love of Jesus Christ to the community in a relevant, targeted, and tangible way by addressing a specific need within the community. This project aligns with the mission and vision of Strengthen Thy Sister to encourage and empower women to strengthen themselves while strengthening their families, relationships, and communities.

Strengthen Thy Sister Mission
Encouraging and empowering women to strengthen themselves
while strengthening their families, relationships and communities.

↓

Vision
Love Thy Neighbor

↓

Strategic Planning
Survey Community Needs and Review

↓

Determine, Vet, and Partner

↓

Address the Need
Jennings School District Hope House

↓

Results and Impact

APPENDIX B

Project Implementation Timeline

Week 1	January - 2022
Strengthen Thy Sister President submitted a letter to the Jennings School District Superintendent to present the Liberty DMIN thesis project and seek approval to implement it. The parties met and permission was granted to implement the project.	

Week 2	January 2022
The Strengthen Thy Sister Board of Directors and Strengthen Thy Sister participants will meet via Zoom to discuss the project plan and the ministry outreach expansion community organization Jennings School District Hope House for homeless students and families facing crisis. Appendix A-B	
Strengthen Thy Sister participants will complete the pre-anonymous questionnaire and review public data regarding COVID-19, food insecurity, food deserts, and homeless students in the Jennings School District. Appendix C	

Week 2	January 2022
The Strengthen Thy Sister board of directors, Strengthen Thy Sister participants, and Jennings Hope House executive director will meet. During this meeting, the Jennings Hope House Director will present and explain the Hope House program and how it assists homeless students and families facing crisis. Strengthen Thy Sister will present the ministry outreach expansion project again and the implementation process.	

Week 3-12	January - March 31, 2022
Strengthen Thy Sister and its participants will begin implementing the project at Hope House. This process includes completing the pre- and post-questionnaires. (Appendix C-D)	
Strengthen Thy Sister, and participants will provide groceries for Hope House for three months (January – March) to assist with providing meals to the students and families residing at Hope House. The execution of the project is the result of the partnership between Strengthen Thy Sister partners and Jennings Hope House to expand ministry outreach. The initial $900.00 was provided in January and the remaining $1,800.00 was provided in February to cover February and March groceries and helped to offset the budget.	
This project aligns with Strengthen Thy Sister's Ministry mission by strengthening its impact on the community through partnerships that provide tangible support to community organizations such as Jennings Hope House for homeless students and students facing a family crisis.	

Week 13	April 2022
The researcher and Hope House Director will meet to discuss the outcome of the implementation of the ministry outreach expansion project. Week 12 ended the purchase of	

groceries. The Project Outcome report was submitted to the researcher in April 2022.
Appendix K

APPENDIX C

Participant Pre-Anonymous Questionnaire

Please complete the following questionnaire, which is designed to evaluate your outreach service to the community. For questions requiring a written response, complete with brief but complete answers. The questions should be answered in their entirety in one setting. Allow 15-20 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Date:

1. Who do you consider your neighbor to be according to scripture and in the context of community?

2. Have you participated in a community service project within the last year?

   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No

3. If, "Yes," which areas? Check each that applies.

   ☐ Boy and Girls Club   ☐ Health Care
   ☐ Clothing Drive   ☐ Homeless
   ☐ Correctional System   ☐ Policy Development
   ☐ Disabled   ☐ Senior Care
   ☐ Domestic Violence   ☐ Veterans Services
   ☐ Educational System   ☐ Voting Rights\Registration
   ☐ Financial Literacy   ☐ Others:
   ☐ Food Pantry
   ☐ Foster Care

4. How frequently do you participate in community service projects?

5. What are some needs within your community?

6. How have you contributed to those needs?

7. How important to you are ministry and community organization partnerships to address community needs?

8.

APPENDIX D

Focus Group – Post Questionnaire

The purpose of this focus group session is for participants to share their experiences as a result of participating in the Strengthen Thy Sister Ministry Outreach Expansion project. You may share and discuss the responses to your questions as you choose during the focus session. This focus group will take approximately 50-60 minutes.

1. Why did you choose to participate in this Ministry Outreach Expansion project?

2. What was your knowledge of food insecurity, homeless students, and youth prior to this project?

3. What other community organizations are you interested in supporting as a result of participating in this project?

4. Do you believe ministry and community organization partnerships provide an opportunity to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed while addressing community needs? Yes or No. Please expound.

APPENDIX E

Hope House Project Outcome Questions

1. How many individuals were served, and how many meals were provided per week to students and families of Jennings School District Hope Houses?

2. How did the three-month supply of groceries help offset Hope Houses' operational costs, and in what specific areas?

3. How can ministries and community organizations partner together to address other needs of Hope Houses?

4. Provide an overall summary of the impact on Hope House students as a result of the implementation of this project.

5. How did this project help address food insecurities and the food desert among the students and families of Jennings School District?

Jennings School District Letter

January 2, 2022

RE Jennings School District Hope House 1 & 11

Dear Dr. Knight

As a graduate student at the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as a part of the requirements for the Doctor of Ministry Degree. The title of my **project is Leveraging Ministry and Community Partnerships to Address Community Needs**. The purpose of this qualitative research study is to create a model for ministries to partner with local organizations to help address community needs as identified by the ministry and community partner.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research at Jennings School District Hope House for homeless students and students facing a crisis. Also, I am requesting that Dr. Vernice Hicks-Prophet present the Hope House program and outcomes of the project implementation to Strengthen Thy Sister Board of Directors, project participants and community stakeholders.

The project implementation includes the purchase of groceries for Hope House 1 & 11 families and students for three months beginning January 2022. No data records will be requested nor will staff or clients be requested to participate or provide any information. All data regarding homeless students will be retrieved from The Missouri Department of Social Services-Children Division and Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education public databases. Also, there will be no recording or video.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on official letterhead indicating your approval—OR—respond by email.

Sincerely,

Chaunceia R. Mayfield
Graduate Student, School of Divinity, Liberty University

APPENDIX G

Participant Recruitment Letter

Dear Project Study Participants,

As a graduate student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am completing a project as part of the requirements for the Doctor of Ministry Degree. The purpose of this DMIN project is to expand Strengthen Thy Sister's outreach impact by leveraging ministry and community organization partnerships to address community needs.

My project title is Leveraging Ministry and Community Partnerships to Address Community Needs. You are invited to participate in the project. To participate, you must serve on the board of Strengthen Thy Sister Ministry, be a ministry volunteer, community stakeholder, or director of a community organization.

If you agree to participate in the project, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Attend an initial meeting via Zoom to include the Strengthen Thy Sister Board, Strengthen Thy Sister volunteers, and community stakeholders. During this meeting, the ministry expansion project will be presented and discussed. (There will be no recording).

2. Complete an anonymous prequestionnaire via Google Docs that will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. The questionnaire will be presented and discussed during the initial meeting.

3. Attend a second meeting via Zoom with the Jennings Hope House Director for approximately one hour. The director will present the Hope House program and address any questions regarding it. (There will be no recording.)

4. Provide three months of groceries for Hope Houses 1 & 2 for the purpose of providing meals for homeless students and families in crisis.

5. Attend a post-third meeting (focus group) via Zoom with the Strengthen Thy Sister board, volunteers, community stakeholders, and the Hope House director to review and discuss project implementation outcomes. This meeting will take approximately 50-60 minutes. (There will be no recording.)

If you choose to participate in this project, a consent form is available that contains additional information regarding this project. Please take time to read the entire consent form and ask questions before deciding whether to participate in the project. The consent to participate will be verbally stated during the Zoom meeting. Doing so will indicate that you have received and read the consent information during the meeting and would like to participate in the project. (Verbal consent during the meeting).

Participant Consent Form

Title of the Project: Leveraging Ministry and Community Partnerships to Address Community Needs.

Principal Investigator: Chaunceia R Mayfield, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a volunteer within Strengthen Thy Sister Ministry, a community stakeholder, or a director of a community organization.

Taking part in this project is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may refuse to answer any questions that you choose not to answer. You may also withdraw from the project at any time. Refer to the withdrawing section from the study.

Please take time to read this entire form and to ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this project.

What is the study about, and why is it being done?

The purpose of this DMIN project is to expand Strengthen Thy Sister's outreach ministry impact by leveraging ministry and community organization partnerships to address a specific community need. This project could provide a model for other ministries and community organizations to partner together to address community needs.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to participate in the following ways:

1. You will be asked to attend meetings and focus groups (via Zoom) to include the Strengthen Thy Sister board, Strengthen Thy Sister partners, and community stakeholders. The project includes a partnership with Jennings School District Hope Houses for homeless students and families facing a crisis. There will be no video or recording (Appendix A).

2. Complete an anonymous questionnaire that will take 15-20 minutes. The questionnaire will be presented during the initial meeting (Appendix B).

3. Attend a meeting with the Jennings Hope Houses director for approximately one hour. The director will present the Hope House program. No clients or staff will participate in the meeting.

4. Provide groceries for Hope House 1 & 2 for the purpose of providing meals for homeless students and families in crisis that reside at Hope House for three months.

5. Attend a post meeting with the Strengthen Thy Sister Board, Strengthen Thy Sister volunteers, community stakeholders, and Hope House Director to review and discuss the outcomes of the project implementation. This meeting will take approximately 40-60 minutes (Appendixes C-D).

How could you or others benefit from this study?

The benefits of this study could be based on the participants' expressed interest. Participants could benefit from this study by gaining a greater awareness of the needs in the community where Strengthen Thy Sister is located. They could also benefit by having an opportunity to address the identified need. The data provided could assist participants with information needed to expand opportunities beyond the project.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

There is no known risk associated with completing the questionnaire or attending meetings.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private and stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the anonymous questionnaire. The data/outcomes from the questionnaire will be discussed during the meeting.

All information will be stored on a password-locked computer. The meetings will not be recorded.

Data shared regarding homeless students is public data from the Department of Social Services-Children Division and the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

There is a possibility that the study will be published, or I may refer to the study in the future. In this event, I will continue to use pseudonyms and alter identifying details to protect your anonymity.

What I have learned from the study and the outcomes from the project implementation will be shared with the Strengthen Thy Sister Board and volunteers, project participants, community stakeholders, and Jennings School District Superintendent and Hope House Director.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any questions or to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please inform Chaunceia R. Mayfield that you wish to discontinue your participation. Do not submit your study materials. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515, or email irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

Before agreeing to participate in the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic social distance requirements, the Participant Consent Form was shared during the initial Zoom meeting. I have asked questions and received answers. My verbal consent to participate was shared during the Project Zoom meeting.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

Pre-Questionnaire Participant Responses

1) Who do you consider your neighbor to be according to scripture and in the context of community?	
Responses	
1.	Anyone in proximity of you, siblings, family, neighbors, and strangers.
2.	My neighbor is anyone to whom I can show Christian love by caring for them the same as I would want to be cared for if I was in need. I enjoy performing intentional and random acts of kindness toward others.
3.	Everyone and anyone we encounter. Hebrews 13:1-3 says, keep on loving one another as your brothers & sisters, showing hospitality to strangers. Mark 12:31 says, love your neighbors, as you love yourself.
4.	Everyone
5.	My neighbor is anyone in need of help.
6.	Anyone that I come in contact with and has a need.
7.	Everyone is my neighbor. Every person in the world.
8	Any human being I come in contact with.
9	Everyone
10	According to the scripture, I consider my neighbor to be anyone in my general area or reasonable proximity.
11	Everyone
12	I consider my neighbor to be, based on scripture and in the context of community, my brother and sister who I see each day and come in contact with.
13	Everyone
14	Anyone that I come into contact with each day and anywhere I may be.
15	My neighbor is anyone that I come in contact with on a daily basis. Starting with my neighbor next door, co-workers, church, and community at large. All human beings.

2) Have you participated in a community service project within the last year? If yes, which areas? Check each that applies:	
Responses	
1	Yes. Food Pantry, Homeless and STS Outreach Project.
2	Yes. Clothing Drive, Food Pantry, Youth Organizations; Clothing and monetary donations to Marygrove Children's Home; Strengthen Thy Sister Projects
3	Yes. Senior Care, Veterans Service, STS Back to School Project.
4	Yes. Educational System, Financial Literacy and Food Pantry
5	Yes. Clothing Drive; Educational System; Food Pantry; Senior Care; Youth Organizations; Strengthen Thy Sister Outreach Project.
6	Yes. Clothing Drive, Disabled, Food Pantry, Homeless, Senior Care and STS.

7	Yes. STS, Clothing Drives, Financial Literacy, Homeless, Financial Assistance and Personal Essentials Pantry.
8	Yes. Health Care System and Strengthen Thy Sister Outreach Project
9	Yes. STS, Food Pantry, Senior Care and Voting Rights\Registration
10	Yes. Substance Abuse, Domestic Violence, Homeless, Food Pantry, Young Women College Students and STS projects.
11	Yes. Strengthen Thy Sister Outreach Project, Clothing Drive and Food Pantry.
12	Yes. STS, Clothing Drive; Domestic Violence; Educational System; Financial Literacy; Food Pantry; Foster Care; Health Care System; Homeless; Policy Development; Senior Care; Veterans Services; Voting Rights\Registration; Youth Organizations
13	Yes. Clothing Drive; Disabled; Educational System; Food Pantry; Health Care System; Homeless; Senior Care; Veterans Services; Youth Organizations and STS Outreach project.
14	Yes. Clothing Drive and STS Ministry's various community projects throughout the years.
15	Yes. Clothing Drive; Educational System; Financial Literacy; Food Pantry; Foster Care; Homeless; Policy Development; Senior Care; Voting Rights\Registration; Youth Organizations and STS. Outreach Project.

3) How frequently do you participate in community service projects?	
Responses	
1	If I'm aware of a situation and/or whenever I am asked to participate or volunteer to help meet a need.
2	Whenever my church requests donations for our food pantry and for Thanksgiving and Christmas baskets.
3	Occasionally
4	Monthly
5	Periodically
6	Once a month and all holidays.
7	Once a week
8	At least once a week
9	Once a week.
10	Three or four times a year.
11	Monthly
12	On a monthly basis.
13	Weekly
14	Yearly with STS and 3-4 times a year clothing drive.
15	Three to four times a year.

4) What are some needs within your community?
Responses

1	Affordable healthcare, affordable housing for the homeless, mental health education and treatment facilities, drug treatment programs.
2	We need more grocery stores and food pantries in underserved communities.
3	Information about programs such as employment, education opportunities, financial literacy, business development, personal wellness, health resources, practical strategies for dealing with stress & mental challenges, food & medication accessibility/assistance for the elderly & underserved and Veterans assistance program availability.
4	Mental health education and financial literacy. Life coach mentors for ages 15-25.
5	Health education, housing for homeless, and youth recreation centers.
6	Senior transportation, accessible sidewalks for wheelchairs and walkers, and accessible bathrooms.
7	Housing, financial stability, transportation, mental health facilities and spiritual outreach.
8	More grocery stores.
9	Substance abuse programs.
10	Affordable housing, access to fresh fruits and vegetables, and affordable childcare.
11	Mental health facilities, more grocery stores and affordable housing
12	Mentorship programs for women of color as well as parenting workshops and enrichment programs for youth.
13	Poverty, homelessness, domestic violence programs, gun violence, crime
14	Shelter for homeless people throughout our city, county & world. Empowerment centers for our youth.
15	Our community is in need of equitable health care systems/services in under resourced communities. There is also a great need for services and housing for youth who have aged out of the foster care system. Grocery stores.

5) How have you contributed to those needs?	
Responses	
1	Pray and share Christ. Donate money, clothes and/or household goods and support where I can.
2	Donate money to help provide food for families in need
3	Provide food & financial assistance to the elderly/underserved in my neighborhood & outside when I can. Share the gospel with those around me. I work with veterans and share any employment or educational opportunities.
4	Commitment to Youth Education and STS outreach ministry project.
5	Financial support to youth education and youth mental illness
6	Supporting community pantries, supporting, and volunteering at senior centers.
7	I volunteer at New Hope Resource Center, an organization run by my church, Morning Star Church, which helps people to get and to stay financially stable and spiritually connected. I also volunteer with Strengthen Thy Sister and contribute

	to the needs they identify throughout the year. I also donate to various local organizations.
8	Donate to food pantries and help with food baskets during the year.
9	Meals on Wheels, Food Pantry, Elections
10	Donate to food pantries.
11	Serve in my church food pantry and prepare holiday food baskets.
12	I have been able to contribute to the needs of my community by being a presence and active volunteer in both my church environment and community service organizations.
13	I assist with food drives and clothes drives and provide home care to Medicaid clients who can't afford to pay for the services. I also serve veterans, disabled and seniors with in-home care services, Boys and Girls Club, and YWCA programs and provide tutoring for students.
14	I donate to homeless and youth programs.
15	I work with agencies that provide youth services. I also advocate for policy changes that directly affect my community.

6) How important to you are ministry and community organization partnerships to address community needs?	
Responses	
1	Ministry and community partnerships are needed to help resolve many issues that plague our communities.
2	Very important; especially the involvement of my church in collecting food (Thanksgiving and/or Christmas Dinner), our church food pantry, back-to-school supplies for children, and/or monetary donations to children's organizations (St. Jude).
3	It is extremely critical because we as the Church in community are the gifts, light, hands & tools of resources that God uses in the community to provide & to serve the needs of the people.
4	Critical if we are to make a positive, lifelong, and sustainable impact in improving lives and communities.
5	It takes all of us to help our communities survive, especially our children.
6	God's word states that we should help and support those who are in need.
7	The more collaboration there is between those in ministry and organizations throughout the entire metropolitan area, which are helping those in need, the wider the influence and awareness of both. The result is combined efforts with greater resources to meet those needs and the ability to develop best practices.
8	Very important because it takes a village and both working together can help address community needs. It also opens the door to share the Gospel.
9	Ministry outreach and partnerships like the one with Jennings School District are vital to providing support to under resourced communities.
10	I believe it's critical for ministry and community organizations to collaborate to address the needs of the community so that both can work together.

11	Vital because it gives ministries the opportunity to know the community they serve and to share the Gospel while meeting needs.
12	It is very important to me that both ministry and community organizations build great partnerships to help accommodate the concerns and needs of the community. By doing so, there can be a decline in the deficiencies that are currently present.
13	Extremely important. It's a part of our purpose for being on this earth to work together to address spiritual and social needs.
14	It is particularly important because this is a way that the ministry and community can stay connected to each other and for the community to have an avenue/resource to the ministry.
15	Ministry and community partnerships are extremely important and vital. We are called as Christians to be concerned with and to serve the communities that God has called us to. It provides an opportunity to develop relationships that can open the door to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed.

Anonymous Post Questionnaire Participant Responses

1) Why did you choose to participate in this Ministry Outreach Expansion project?	
Responses	
1	To be of service and to help the community.
2	I was asked if I would like to participate as a volunteer and I'm passionate about helping youth.
3	I was introduced to the Ministry Outreach project by Min. Mayfield. I'm always looking for ways to serve my community, especially those that are under-served.
4	I participated in this Ministry Outreach Expansion project because I believe it is important to share my opinion and to demonstrate the importance of collaboration between church and the community.
5	My love & service to God.
6	Because it is my duty & responsibility as a disciple of Christ. Scripture reminds us of this responsibility on numerous occasions: John 15:12, Heb. 13:16 & Prov. 19:17. He has put us here in the earth to be a blessing to others, as He says in Luke 6:38. The Holy Spirit will place the desire to serve others, as God has so freely given & met every need you have. God will bless us to be a blessing to the other.
7	Yes, I believe that we are to support others' physical and spiritual needs.
8	I participated in this because I have a strong interest in helping those in need throughout the community and joining efforts with various organizations and ministries to accomplish this. I am especially focused on combining efforts throughout all of St. Louis, St. Louis County, St. Charles County, and the entire metropolitan area.
9	To help others in need.
10	I believe the faith-based and secular organizations should work in concert to assist school districts to address the social and emotional needs of students.
11	I see this collaborative partnership providing support and resources.
12	To meet a need.
13	I have been a volunteer with Strengthen Thy Sister for over 10 years and want to expand the outreach we do to serve our community.
14	I chose to participate in the ministry outreach expansion project to assist the community with receiving the necessary support during the COVID-19 pandemic.
15	I believe it is vital to support community outreach that gives life and shows love, especially to children.

2) What was your knowledge of food insecurity, food deserts, homeless students, and youth prior to this project?

Responses	
1	I was not aware of food insecurity and food deserts. I have family and know of individuals that are homeless and are in foster care.
2	I was very knowledgeable of the homeless and foster care youth everywhere. But I did not know about this particular situation or the food insecurities and food deserts within the community.
3	My understanding of food insecurity, homelessness and youth in foster care came primarily from STS, news articles/reports, various agencies I donate to, and what has been shared personally by others who are involved with homeless youth and our community.
4	I was somewhat knowledgeable about food insecurity, homelessness and foster care youth prior to this project, but I learned a lot more through the data shared.
5	I became more aware of this due to my service with Strengthen Thy Sister and the community initiatives that we partner with.
6	I didn't know about the food insecurity of homeless youth, but I became more aware and knowledgeable through STS. Also, throughout my life I watched my parents who taught me to be & exemplified the heart of servanthood to our fellow man, our brothers & sisters in Christ, as well as Christian youth groups I served in.
7	I had some knowledge because I've worked with the homeless and was a foster parent for years. The detailed data was extremely helpful.
8	I was aware of the need in Jennings School District and their opening of Hope Houses 1 and 2. I was aware of a need throughout the St. Louis metropolitan area in helping with homelessness and especially children in foster care. The information about insecurity and food deserts was new information and eye-opening.
9	I knew about the food insecurity in my area. Not well informed about homeless youth. STS presented valuable information and data on both subjects.
10	I was aware of food insecurity and food deserts. I'm also very knowledgeable of homeless and foster care youth. This project brought awareness of the need for faith communities, nonprofits, business leaders, state and local governments to find new ways to come together to leverage opportunities that will contribute to improving the lives of those that live in underserved communities.
11	I was not aware that Jennings was considered a food desert, but I knew about food insecurities. I have worked with organizations in the past that have assisted with both homeless and youth.
12	I attended and participated in fundraisers for Marygrove Children's Home.
13	I was very familiar overall with the Homeless community and food insecurities within North County. My knowledge of foster care youth was limited until STS shared data regarding homeless youth and youth in the foster care system in St. Louis County.
14	I was not aware of food insecurities until STS shared the information and data. I knew the urgency and need to assist with helping homeless and foster care youth and that is why I wanted to participate in this outreach project.

15	I was not aware of food insecurities or the food desert in Jennings. I have done extensive work with sexually abused foster children in independent living programs.

3) What other community organizations are you interested in supporting as a result of participating in this project?
Responses

1	Narcotics anonymous programs
2	I do not have a particular community organization, but I'm always willing to help and give wherever I can.
3	No additional ones at this time but I would like to continue supporting homeless youth
4	I will continue to support the YWCA homeless program and STS outreach ministry.
5	Organizations that help youth and provide food and services for under resourced communities
6	Veterans, their families & senior community as well as wherever God leads or provides the opportunity to share my gifts, time, talents, and treasure.
7	I do volunteer work with the homeless and food pantries.
8	I would be interested in helping any organization that has a focus on helping homeless youth.
9	Other projects involving children
10	I volunteer my time and give donations to several community events throughout the year.
11	I would be interested in supporting Ukraine refugees and children whose parents have substance abuse problems.
12	My church youth program and STS community projects
13	Organizations that provide services to youth in foster care
14	I am interested in supporting other community organizations that continue to look out for the well-being and advancement of those that are less fortunate.
15	Summer camps for foster & sexually abused children and Girls Inc.

4) Do you believe ministry and community organization partnerships provide an opportunity to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed while addressing community needs? Yes or No. Please expound.
Responses

1	Yes. Community organizations often have the knowledge, systems and infrastructure to address community needs that churches/ministry don't have and these partnerships are critical for both.
2	Yes, because you will be doing what the Word of God says while sharing the Gospel

3	Yes, absolutely! God has called each of us to love thy neighbor, bless thy neighbors as He has blessed us. We are His vessels by which His work will be done in our community.
4	Yes, however, as a former community leader, I was sometimes faced with objection to sharing the Gospel.
5	Yes. I feel that when we partner with different organizations by contributing monetary donations and other resources that this is something that the organization may have been praying for and God allowed STS to be that resource.
6	Yes. As you meet an immediate need such as food and shelter and provide encouragement, it allows others to see the love & character of Christ in action through others. God is glorified and while edifying humanity.
7	Yes. Serving the community is part of the Great Commission, which is to preach the gospel and support those who are in need in whatever way possible
8	Yes, by working in partnership, the message of loving thy neighbor is demonstrated in word and deed. The partnership also connects the ministry and congregation to resources in the community.
9	Yes. The word can be used to encourage those in the community. Deeds and the word must work together.
10	Yes. I believe whenever and wherever an opportunity avails itself to share the Gospel in word and deed
11	Yes. When the focus involves building a community and demonstrating acts of love and kindness, it allows the opportunity to discuss Christ.
12	Yes. Ministry and community partnerships provide both entities an opportunity to work together to address community needs. These partnerships also help those within the ministry who are in need of resources and support. It goes both ways.
13	Yes. I believe the partnerships provide an opportunity to show and share the love of Christ by meeting people right where they are. Helping the community should not be contingent on someone being a Christian but rather that we are all humans and have a responsibility to love in word and deed. These partnerships also create systems that address the spiritual and practical aspects of the community and ministry.
14	I believe that there are some ministry and community organization partnerships that are able to provide an opportunity to share the gospel of Jesus Christ in both word and deed.
15	Yes. It is undeniable that when ministries seek to meet needs in the community through strategic partnerships it opens the door the share the Gospel of Jesus.

Jennings School District Hope Houses Project Outcomes Responses

Measure	Outcomes
How many individuals were served, and how many meals were provided per week to students and families of Jennings School District Hope Houses?	Both homes served up to fourteen individuals seven days a week for a total of 392 meals were served, which included nutritious breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks.
How did the three-month supply of groceries help offset Hope Houses' operational costs, and in what specific areas?	The three-month supply of groceries was a tremendous help. The donation first helped address the food insecurity and food desert in our community. Also, due to the increasing cost of groceries, this generous donation helped us to continue providing our children with healthy food and snacks. The donation also afforded us the opportunity not to use funds allocated for maintenance, utilities, and upkeep of both Hope Houses to make up the cost of purchasing healthy food items instead of the low-cost unhealthy processed food items.
How can ministries and community organizations partner together to address other needs of Hope Houses?	Ministries and organizations can partner together by attending meetings, activities, and functions that support the work and mission of Hope House. They can also continue to partner together to help supply items needed for the operation of Hope House listed below and invite others to do the same. Other needs of both Hope Houses are as follows: - Clothing (outerwear, underclothing, socks, pajamas) Hygiene products and toiletries - Laundry detergent, linen, comforters, pillowcases, bath towels - Comfort toys for the younger children, games (interactive) that can be played at home to keep students actively engaged. - Chapter books (older students) and books for primary students for recreational reading - Volunteers to tutor students in the areas of reading and math - School supplies, arts and crafts supplies Volunteers who can assist with chaperoning the children during their sporting events after school, i.e., football games, baseball, cheerleading

	activities, etc.
Provide an overall summary of the impact on Hope House students as a result of the implementation of this project.	The impact of this project has provided a generous donation to purchase healthy food and snacks for students in both Hope Houses. Providing a healthy meal daily will impact nutritional health and well-being as well as the mental capacity of our Hope House students. Years of studies focused on the benefits of improving the health of students have shown that nutrition can have a positive influence on student learning and behavior. This project also brought attention to the ongoing support we provide our students and families through our wraparound service initiatives, such as the two Hope Houses, two full-service on-site health centers, a food bank, washing machines in each school, and a grocery store on-site at one of our elementary schools.
How did this project help address food insecurities and the food desert among the students and families of Jennings School District?	This project contributed to providing a healthy balanced diet for our Hope House students without compromising the selection of healthy food items and settling for unhealthy food items in order to cut costs. Our students deserve the best – a quality education, a safe and functional home environment, and a healthy mind and body. Our ultimate goal is for every student to become productive citizens and prepared to compete on a local and global level in a career of their own choosing. Organizations, like Strengthen Thy Sister, is making our mission possible: to serve the whole child in an effective and efficient manner.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

January 5, 2022

Chaunceia Mayfield
Howard Owens

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY21-22-556 Leveraging Ministry and Community Partnerships to Address Community Needs

Dear Chaunceia Mayfield and Howard Owens,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study does not classify as human subjects research. This means you may begin your project with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study is not considered human subjects research for the following reason: Your project will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not "designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge" according to 45 CFR 46. 102(l).

Please note that this decision only applies to your current application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued non-human subjects research status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

Also, although you are welcome to use our recruitment and consent templates, you are not required to do so. If you choose to use our documents, please replace the word *research* with the word *project* throughout both documents.

If you have any questions about this determination or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your application's status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office