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White followership: creating a pathway toward black-centered leadership and experience from the reality of white hegemony in an evangelical, urban, multiethnic church

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Project Thesis

**WHITE FOLLOWERSHIP: CREATING A PATHWAY TOWARD BLACK-
CENTERED LEADERSHIP AND EXPERIENCE FROM THE REALITY OF
WHITE HEGEMONY IN AN EVANGELICAL, URBAN, MULTIETHNIC
CHURCH**

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
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We do not always see the way of Jesus in people who have a dominant role in society, but for some reason we keep turning in that direction. We need to turn our heads and look in a different direction. We must see the way of Jesus in those on the margins.

Rev. Dr. Dennis R. Edwards

DEDICATION

To my spiritual and vocational home, The Sanctuary Covenant Church. Your people and vision have taught me more about the way of Jesus, the resilience of hope, and the work of justice as we have pursued the Kingdom in partnership. Together, as God's people, transformation is on the move at the intersection of West Broadway and Lyndale Avenue, and beyond.

To my family, especially Ryan. Your steadfast care for our family, curiosity in this life, partnership throughout the journey, and consistent love serve as tangible expressions of God's faithfulness and goodness in this life. Thank you for serving me and our daughters as Jesus served his beloveds. Achieving my Doctor of Ministry degree and writing this work would not be as substantive without your companionship. Thank you for your support, unreservedly.

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I would not be who I am today and the pastor I seek to become without the people and staff at The Sanctuary Covenant Church in Minneapolis, MN. I came to that church in my mid-twenties completely unsure of myself and my call. They allowed me a space to grow, develop, and transform — not many have the patience for such incremental development. Their trust in me, embrace of my call, and encouragement of my voice have nourished my soul in these ten years. I have appreciated conversations with so many congregants interested to know more about my work and I am grateful for their encouragement to keep writing. Many provided meals, offered prayers, and always had encouraging words through this process. Thank you also to those who read my project and provided invaluable feedback. It has been a great joy to serve together in pursuit of

our vision. Together, we are on a mission as God's people for the advancement of the Kingdom in North Minneapolis. Partnering in our pursuit to follow Jesus remains the greatest gift of my vocational journey thus far. To the staff at The Sanctuary: you are my family, my friends, my people. We have shared in the hardest and most joyful seasons of ministry and life and your steadfast pursuit of Jesus is unwavering. It is an honor to be in partnership as we pursue our mission together. Thank you for your support through this program. In particular, it is an honor to follow the leadership of our current senior pastor, Rev. Edrin C. Williams. Leading The Sanctuary is one of the hardest callings given its audacious vision, diverse congregation, and distinct neighborhood. He leads The Sanctuary with faithfulness, humility, wisdom, and grace. Partnering in ministry at The Sanctuary has been a gift I deeply appreciate. He is more than a colleague, but a friend and brother.

While I always aspired earning a doctoral degree, it was not until my former senior pastor at The Sanctuary, Rev. Dr. Dennis R. Edwards, directly asked me in our first one-on-one supervisory meeting when I was going to pursue doctoral studies that I considered it as a real possibility. His encouragement and companionship along the journey awakened a certainty of my vocational calling I had not grasped before. Through his leadership he shared space with me and allowed me to grow in pastoral ministry, unlike any other male pastor I have experienced. His words are never cheap and always backed with integrity and certainty. It was my greatest joy to follow his leadership, be mentored in his wisdom, shepherded in his care, and ministered in his pastoral

excellence. He has always believed in me and ignited an esteem for myself I had yet to grasp as a young pastor.

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WHITE FOLLOWERSHIP: CREATING A PATHWAY TOWARD BLACK-CENTERED LEADERSHIP AND EXPERIENCE FROM THE REALITY OF WHITE HEGEMONY IN AN EVANGELICAL, URBAN, MULTIETHNIC CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

The movement of evangelical multiethnic churches, which occurred in the late-1990s and into the early 2000s, sought racial justice by developing racially diverse congregations as their core distinction of Christian discipleship. These evangelical multiethnic churches are situated in a longer historical narrative of black-led, black-centered ecumenical leadership focused on a theological framework of racial reconciliation, cross-racial interpersonal friendships, and diverse cultural expressions. However, research of these churches reveal they actually perpetuate the very inequalities they seek to dismantle. White hegemony remains intact in these multicultural Christian communities through its maintenance of white dominant structures and cultural norms, even with black-led senior leadership. The problem this project seeks to address through the concept of “white followership” is the lack of experience and skills among white evangelicals particularly in multiethnic churches to yield normative power and institutional culture to another cultural expression and organizational power arrangement.

Utilizing Dr. Patsy Baker Blackshear's definition of an exemplary follower, this project will develop the construct of white followership and the particular behaviors and characteristics white congregants in a minority-led multiethnic congregation can adopt.

While this project relies on research of evangelical multiethnic churches across the United States, the focal site in which the construct of white followership will initially be applied is The Sanctuary Covenant Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, which is where I, a white female pastor, serve as its Associate Pastor. The methodological approach of this project is interdisciplinary, integrating history, anti-racism research, and white racial identity studies to elucidate the problem of white supremacy in the United States and the American church. The project relies heavily on: 1) sociological studies of religion, race, and power to enumerate the problem of white hegemony in evangelical multiethnic congregations, 2) theological and biblical studies to outline the imperative shift of power needed in white-dominated evangelical multiethnic churches; 3) business and leadership studies to introduce the concept of followership and enrich the construction of white followership; and 4) observing resistance among white congregants as change produces shifts in the status quo, adapting Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR) and autoethnographic stories to measure change. White followership, in the scope of this project, focuses primarily on a pedagogical approach, institutional strategy, and overall ecumenical culture primarily expressed at The Sanctuary. It does not address more granular aspects of the communal worship experience, external evangelistic service, and community engagement and action, though those are important considerations as the applied work of white followership expands. Overall, the construct of white followership,

while not exhaustive for the remedy of white hegemony in evangelical multiethnic churches, provides an innovative, malleable, and promising solution forward for white congregants to employ toward greater racial justice.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CPAR	Critical Participatory Action Research
ECC	Evangelical Covenant Church
Fellowship Church	Church for the Fellowship of all Peoples
The Sanctuary	The Sanctuary Covenant Church

INTRODUCTION

“I never thought of it before.”

That phrase was echoed by many dedicated, committed, and thoughtful white congregants during a conversation about the relationship between power and race, and specifically how normative white dominant culture is perpetuated even in multiethnic churches. It was a conversation geared toward white congregants at The Sanctuary Covenant Church¹ in Minneapolis, MN — an urban, multiethnic church striving to enact racial justice through gospel-centered discipleship — examining how white supremacy specifically infiltrates multiethnic churches and thus stalls its vision of racial justice. During the conversation I shared current research pertaining to the particular problem of white supremacy in multiethnic churches and how it is enacted in both overt and covert ways. All of the white congregants were largely unaware such a particular variety of racism was apparent; I was once in their shoes.

When I came to The Sanctuary ten years ago to join the staff, I knew there was a great need to work toward racial justice, as racism was antithetical to the gospel of Jesus Christ and it was so devastating and rampant in the United States and the world. I did, however, naively assume that being a part of an urban, multiethnic church would be a different experience, given its foundational vision to uproot white supremacy. I have learned many lessons on staff at The Sanctuary as a white female pastor over these years and many of my assumptions about the multiethnic church have been challenged. But what has been most revealing is the reality that white people do not leave their power and

¹ Herein referred to as The Sanctuary.

privilege at the door when they go to a multiethnic church, even one led by a black pastor with a diverse staff and elder board. Diverse friendships alone will not stave off the evil of white supremacist power norms. Furthermore, uncovering the nuances of white supremacy in an urban, multiethnic church has opened my eyes to the complexity of how racism functions, specifically normative white culture that inadvertently, yet powerfully, impedes the very mission of multiethnic churches seeking racial justice. The most important lesson I have learned and experienced is that the leadership of a healthy black pastor, a person well acquainted with marginalization, is our best teacher and guide along faithful followership of Jesus Christ who was also well acquainted with marginalization. So, given the conversation described above with other white brothers and sisters at The Sanctuary and their awakening to power and race in our beloved multiethnic church, we were all eager to do better and work toward tangible transformation. But how?

Given our particular vision to work toward racial justice, our context as an urban church in a predominantly black neighborhood, and our founding distinctive to be a black-led and black-centered multiethnic church intertwined with the prevalent problem of white hegemony; black-centered leadership and experience is what is necessary toward the culmination of our vision of racial justice. But with the reality of white hegemony present in our church, a gap remains. I propose one facet in bridging the gap and the transformation needed (and the particular facet that is most contextual for me to lead as a white female pastor at The Sanctuary) is the construct and embodiment of “white

followership.”² White followership is a concept I develop in the chapters that follow. It is necessary because white people are accustomed with normative power and experience, but becoming a part of The Sanctuary, no matter how eager and humble our approach might be, we likely have not had the experience of following the leadership of a black pastor and considered how congregational and community life might be different apart from our normative experience. There must be a pathway provided, a discipleship framework developed, particular characteristics expected, and a standard raised for white congregants toward the realization of our vision of racial justice. Otherwise, our vision stalls, sin pervades, and white supremacy is perpetuated.

Therefore, my project is meant to be a praxis of practical theology — an imagined construct with tangible behaviors and characteristics, grounded in the particular context of The Sanctuary in North Minneapolis. My project is organized into four parts: naming the problem, describing the vision, proposing a methodology toward bridging the gap between the problem and vision, and then measuring if change occurs once implemented.

Thus, chapter one begins by naming the macro problem of white supremacy in the United States and specifically the American white church. Chapter one focuses on three particularities of white supremacy: namely that white supremacy is characterized by power; it is prevalent in all of American culture, society, and religion; and it is experienced by white people and black people in polarizing, opposing ways.

² *White followership* is a construct created by the author, which is derived from the concept of *followership* by Dr. Patsy Baker Blackshear, specifically Blackshear’s definition of an *exemplary follower*, as will be discussed further in this project.

Chapter two continues to name the problem, but specifically its micro presentation in evangelical multiethnic churches like The Sanctuary. Toward that end, chapter two first details the emergence of the multiethnic church by providing a larger historical narrative of the multiethnic church and profiles of particular black pastors and leaders who impacted the particular evangelical multiethnic movement as a response to the sin of white supremacy named in chapter one. The first section enlivens the imperative that the multiethnic ecumenical movement was black-led and black-centered, while still remaining true to its multiethnic identity and vision, and thus has many comparisons to The Sanctuary. The second part of chapter two names the more particular problem of white supremacy in evangelical multiethnic churches that perpetually delineate from their vision of racial justice given the pervasive nature of dominant power. Chapter two, through anecdotes, also illuminates the particular problem of white dominance at The Sanctuary.

Chapter three outlines the vision of The Sanctuary as a black-led, black-centered urban, multiethnic church. In doing so, chapter three provides a contextual analysis of The Sanctuary's neighborhood in North Minneapolis and its imperative to remain a black-centered multiethnic church, and it also provides a biblical framework for a reorientation of power through contextual and thematic parallels found in 1 Peter as a word to diasporic Christians.

Chapter four seeks to bridge the gap from the reality of white hegemony at The Sanctuary to its vision of being a black-led, black-centered urban, multiethnic church through the construct and practice of white followership. Chapter four describes

followership as it relates to the study of leadership by exposing misconceptions of passive, mindless followers and explicates a more robust view of followership. The chapter also defines and describes the particularities of white followership and its action-based praxis as a construct. Chapter four also particularizes white followership as a set of behaviors using Dr. Patsy Blackshear's definition of an exemplary follower as a guiding scaffold. Finally, chapter four begins to imagine the multifaceted approach toward implementing white followership at The Sanctuary through Dr. Jack Mezirow's theory of transformative adult learning through critical self-reflection and action-based formation.

Finally, chapter five states how change will be measured as white followership is implemented at The Sanctuary. I will seek to measure change using three methodologies. First, in observing initial nuances of resistance from white congregants. Second, in utilizing a modified format of Critical Participatory Action Research. Third, utilizing autoethnographic stories to understand if and how transformation is taking place and as an act of worship for the Holy Spirit's active, continued work at The Sanctuary.

To conclude I will provide summarizing deliberations and appendices for further implementation. In all, this project provides a multidisciplinary approach in excavating the particular problem of white supremacy even in multiethnic churches seeking racial justice by envisioning pathways forward toward centering black leadership and experiences. White followership is simply one component in seeking racial justice, but it is an important feature that cannot be minimized. For if it is, an entire demographic of every multiethnic church will continue to perpetuate an elusive, yet perilous feature of racism that impedes the vision of every single church seeking justice. There is a power

problem of white supremacy even in multiethnic churches founded to address such sin, and white congregants are largely unaware of it. In moving the work of God's justice forward, the dominant power of white supremacy must be addressed and white followership is an integral step in moving justice forward.

PART 1: THE PROBLEM

CHAPTER 1

THE PRELUDE TO THE PARTICULAR PROBLEM: THE POWER, PREVALENCE, AND POLARITY OF WHITE SUPREMACY IN THE UNITED STATES AND THE AMERICAN CHURCH

“He blessed the Black man, dearly praying ‘Lord, Wash that poor Soul; make him white by the Washing of thy SPIRIT.’”

—Cotton Mather, 1663-1728³

The problematic power of white supremacy is that it is simultaneously invisible to the oppressor and ubiquitous to the oppressed. The subtle yet destructive reality of white supremacy permeates all facets of American life and yet whites are largely unaware of its power and prevalence and disengaged in dismantling its systemic nature. Richard Hughes,⁴ Christian scholar and historian, captures the invisible, subtle nature of white supremacy in *Myths America Lives By: White Supremacy and the Stories That Give Us Meaning* when he describes it as the great American myth that is so pervasive it is like, “the very air we breathe.”⁵ Hughes defines white supremacy as “the common culture in

³ Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning* (New York: Bold Type Books, 2016), 76.

⁴ Other relevant works by Richard Hughes include *Christian America and the Kingdom of God* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2010) and numerous articles featured in HuffPost.

⁵ Richard T. Hughes, *Myths America Lives By: White Supremacy and the Stories That Give Us Meaning* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2018), 3.

which we live — a culture suffused with the assumption that, in most ways, whites are superior to blacks.”⁶ In short, white supremacy in its most basic form is power — unequal, disparate power based on false hierarchies, systems, and structures of the normative, dominant white culture, which is socially constructed based on skin color, not inherent. Racism is unequal power and its prevalence is so far-reaching and deep-seated in the United States it is experienced as a great polarity between white people and people of color. My task in chapter one is to name the problems of white supremacy and how it shapes both the United States and the American Church — a relationship of equal culpability.

The problems of white supremacy are vast. Good and thorough work has been done to name whiteness, retell its history, interpret its present impact, and forge ways forward.⁷ The scope of this chapter, however, will focus on the problem of power and white supremacy in the United States as well as the American Church. This chapter characterizes power and white supremacy with attention to the prevalence and polarity of power and its manifestations, including highlights of the emergence of Eurocentric Christian theological exceptionalism in American culture. To this end, the chapter

⁶ Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, 4.

⁷ See *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White* by David R. Roediger for a full explanation of how whiteness was formed in the US, the power it was afforded, and the disparities it caused. See also *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo on the particularities of racist actions and ideologies on the part of white Americans in particular. See *Stamped from the Beginning* by Ibram X Kendi for a full historical review and analysis of racist ideas that contribute to racism. See *Troubles I've Seen* by Drew G. I. Hart for theological narration of white supremacy and its impact on the American Church and public sphere, as well as helpful ways forward.

leverages Hughes' *Myths America Lives By* and scholar of the history of race in the United States, Ibram X. Kendi's⁸ *Stamped from the Beginning* and *How to Be an Antiracist* as dialogue partners.

Power: Mining the Myth

Understanding the organization of white supremacy and the ecosystem of racism in the United States requires first addressing its quality as power. If white supremacy is the ordering and (de)valuing of people based on their skin color, then naturally the superior white groups will be afforded power in the given order and structure of race. Therefore, understanding power in white supremacy is imperative. It is of utmost importance to understand specifically both the power of the myth of white supremacy and how it formed the United States, as described by Hughes, and the actualized power white people wield in all American institutions, organizations, and spaces. The works of both Hughes and Kendi are important to the discussion of racism in the United States, therefore, because Hughes exposes the myth of white supremacy and its powerful ideologies, while Kendi recounts white supremacy's power in forming the United States. The power of white supremacy, as Kendi defines, is "the power to categorize and judge, elevate and downgrade, include and exclude...to process distinct individuals, ethnicities, and nationalities into monolithic races."⁹ This is the dominance of white supremacy and,

⁸ Other relevant works by Ibram X. Kendi include *How to Be an Antiracist* (New York: One World, 2019) and *The Black Campus Movement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), and numerous articles featured in *The Atlantic*.

⁹ Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist* (New York: One World, 2019), 38.

as Kendi states, its quality as power lies in its multi-faceted approach in ordering people. While white supremacy's power functions in many different ways, its power lies in its pervasiveness — white supremacy is what informs the organization, history, culture, and society of the United States. It is the power of the very real myth of white supremacy in America that Hughes is trying to expose.

Hughes' aim in his book is first to uncover "that the Myth of White Supremacy is the primal American myth that informs all the others and...one of the chief functions of the other five myths is to protect and obscure the Myth of White Supremacy, to hide it from our awareness and to assure us that we [white people] remain innocent after all."¹⁰ To fully understand Hughes' significant statement, one must first excavate the deeper meaning of a myth — for after all, white supremacy is not a fictitious story, but a factual reality. Hughes explains a myth by sharing its Greek origins meaning, "story."¹¹ But he continues to clarify, "Contrary to colloquial usage, a myth is not a story that is patently untrue. Rather, a myth is a story that, whether true or false, helps us discern the meaning and purpose of our lives and, for that reason, speaks truth to those who embrace it."¹² The essence of Hughes' argument is that, whether founded or unfounded, we make meaning through the stories we tell and embody. In the case of the myth of white supremacy, white people were and still are the standard and all others are a deviation from whiteness. This is the great and tragic American legacy. This is the summation of power.

¹⁰ Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, 3.

¹¹ Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, 10.

¹² Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, 10.

The assemblage of white normative power did not emerge haphazardly. Instead it was calculated, systematic, and multifaceted. It took many forms, spanned multiple theories, and currently undergirds the formation of the United States and indoctrination of white American Christian theology. Supporting this claim, Kendi provides the origins of the African slave trade. But instead of depicting these historical and factual events for the sake of retelling, Kendi's purpose as a historian is to uncover the prevailing and often imperceptible racist ideas that shaped the formation of the United States and informed racist Christian theology. These racist ideas are the foundation of the great American myth of white supremacy, as affirmed by Hughes. Kendi describes the purpose and impact of racist ideas in the United States:

When we look back on our history, we often wonder why so many Americans did not resist slave trading, enslaving, segregating, or now, mass incarcerating. The reason is, again, racist ideas. The principal function of racist ideas in American history has been the suppression of resistance to racial discrimination and its resulting racial disparities. The beneficiaries of slavery, segregation, and mass incarceration have produced racist ideas of Black people being best suited for or deserving of the confines of slavery, segregation, or the jail cell. Consumers of these racist ideas have been led to believe there is something wrong with Black people, and not the policies that have enslaved, oppressed, and confined so many Black people. Racist ideas have done their job on us.¹³

Kendi's words are important because they demonstrate the particular function of racist ideas as both power and staggering privilege. Kendi's explanation also exposes the insidious and often concealed purpose of racist ideas, which is to make it seem normal. After all he states that racist ideas make white people assume there is something wrong with black people instead of the ideologies white people hold about black people and the

¹³ Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 10.

subsequent harm of such beliefs. This is the methodical, intentional purpose of racist thinking.

Both Kendi and Hughes agree racism and the supreme idolization of whiteness formed the United States not only in significant ways, but was embedded in all facets of the formation of the nation. Hughes emphasizes the embedded nature of whiteness when he asserts that white supremacy deeply shaped the United States and eventually became so intertwined in white American ideology that it was seen as something virtuous instead of evil. Racist thinking became the tapestry that wove white American ideology and culture. He supports this claim when he states, “Europeans began to develop the racist stories that gave them meaning...that recast criminal behavior as Christian charity, and that soothed the ‘Christian’ conscience of Western Europe.”¹⁴ Kendi agrees and proves the prevalence of racist ideas by providing a historical overview of the widespread origins of such ideas and the embedded myth of white supremacy that eventually shaped the formation of the United States.

Long before the United States’ Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776 or the first enslaved African arrived at the colony of Virginia in 1619, Gomes Eanes de Zurara of Portugal wrote a book in 1453 that created and solidified a devious and transformative story of power.¹⁵ The production of Zurara’s book, however, presides in the greed and envy of Prince Henry before that.¹⁶ In 1415 Prince Henry of Portugal

¹⁴ Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, 11.

¹⁵ Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, 11.

¹⁶ Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 22.

persuaded his father to venture more heavily into the search for foreign riches through the trade routes.¹⁷ But seduced by the prospect of greater national wealth and prosperity, Prince Henry ventured to develop “the first transatlantic slave-trading policies” and became known as “the first exclusive slave trader of the constructed race of African people.”¹⁸ Through Prince Henry’s impact and legacy, his nephew commissioned Zurara to write the first widespread European book on Africa called, *The Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea*, and its author, Zurara, “became the first race maker and crafter of racist ideas.”¹⁹ The book recounted the first slave auction in Portugal in 1444 and specifically described and placed a judgment on the various skin colors of the people being sold into slavery:

Some captives were ‘white enough, fair to look upon, and well proportioned,’ while others were ‘like mulattoes,’ Zurara reported. Still others were ‘as black as Ethiops, and so ugly’ that they almost appeared as visitors from Hell....Despite their different ethnicities and skin colors, Zurara viewed them as one people — one inferior people.²⁰

Zurara’s words make it is easy for the reader to see how the myth of white supremacy was produced and how it informed a structure of power based on skin color. Kendi, therefore, continues on to show how myths, stories, and theories produced these preposterous and growing racist ideas held widely by Europeans.

¹⁷ Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 22.

¹⁸ Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 39.

¹⁹ Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 39-40.

²⁰ Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 24.

Hughes also recounts these racist ideas and the stories that emerged as a result when he details, “tales of black depravity to claims of black stupidity to affirmations that blacks had more in common with apes than with human beings. These stories rested on other equally malicious narratives — that black skin signaled a curse from God.”²¹ The curse theory gained support in 1578 when “English travel writer George Best...shied away from climate theory...[and] found an alternative” in the Bible.²² The curse theory comes from an interpretation of Genesis in the story of Noah. Kendi describes Best’s development of the curse theory:

In Best’s whimsical interpretation of Genesis, Noah orders his White and ‘Angellike’ sons to abstain from sex with their wives on the Ark, and then tells them that the first child born after the flood would inherit the earth. When the evil, tyrannical, and hypersexual Ham has sex on the Ark, God wills that Ham’s descendants shall be ‘so blacke and loathsome,’ in Best’s telling, ‘that it might remain a spectacle of disobedience to all the worlde.’²³

Best’s racist theological ideology lays an important foundation of racist thinking for white American Christians. That foundation is the reality that dominant cultures have the power to use the Bible to interpret a justification of racism and of slavery, even when the content of the Scriptures tells a much different story of society’s marginalized. In fact, Puritans, reading both Aristotle and the writings of Paul, not only justified but also argued a God-ordained act of ordering people in a hierarchy. Using 1 Corinthians and the “three-tiered hierarchy of slave relations — heavenly master (top), earthly master

²¹ Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, 11-12.

²² Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 31.

²³ Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 31-32.

(middle), enslaved (bottom),” Europeans perpetuated racial hierarchies married to Christian theology; this is the power of white American theological ideology.²⁴

The curse theory endured and from it emerged the myth of benevolent, voluntary slavery.²⁵ Richard Baxter, immersed in curse theory, contended for a feature of slavery in 1664-65 that aligned with his understanding of Christianity and racist belief of what African people needed from white people. “Baxter naively believed there existed in bulk in the slave trade what he called a ‘voluntary-slave.’ He tried to will into existence a world where loving masters bought voluntary slaves to save their souls.”²⁶ To excavate Baxter’s naivety is to unearth the racist idea that Africans need to be saved, and they need white people to act on God’s behalf as their saviors. This is the power of the myth of white supremacy fermented in white Christian elitism. These myths, and others, continued to weave the tapestry of dominant racist ideas often inoculated in Christian theology.

One of the most influential curators of the white American Christian church, before it was a free and independent nation, was Cotton Mather. Mather was an intellectual prodigy, attending Harvard College at the age of eleven.²⁷ He was the son of Increase Mather, a prominent and well-respected minister. Mather was a prolific writer.

²⁴ Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 17.

²⁵ Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 48.

²⁶ Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 48-49.

²⁷ Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 54.

In less than twenty years, Mather wrote “7,000 pages of sermons in his notebooks...far and away more sermonic pages than any other American Puritan.”²⁸ Influential, significant, and prominent were Mather’s writings, ideas, and reach with God-fearing Puritans in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth century. While Mather is most notable for his central role in the Salem Witch Trials, also notable were his racist ideas that infiltrated the formation of white American Christianity.

With an aim to bring social order to the widespread calamities of the 1690s witch-hunts and the establishment of the New England colonies, Mather was resolute on reinforcing a social order and hierarchy. He reinforced a social hierarchy by “convincing the lowly that God and nature had put them there, whether it applied to women, children, enslaved Africans, or poor people.”²⁹ He reinforced a social order by applying it directly to religious belief. Kendi elucidates Mather’s religious underpinnings for a justification of social ordering when he states, “Mather compared egalitarian resisters to that old ambitious Devil, who wanted to become the all-powerful God. Mather’s line of thinking became his everlasting justification of social hierarchy: the ambitious lowly resembled Satan; his kind of elites resembled God.”³⁰ Not only does Mather, in his lifetime, reinforce a God-ordained social hierarchy, but he also assigns a divine and inherent worth to white people, men in particular, and designates divine devaluation of Africans. At first glance Mather’s ordering of a volatile society in its early formation could appear tame

²⁸ Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 54-55.

²⁹ Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 63.

³⁰ Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 63.

and with good-intentions, as the colonies needed structure and stability. But the vociferous nature of its implications and undergirding racist origins impede any virtuous intentions on Mather's part. Consider, for instance, Mather's words cited at the beginning of chapter one and how they embody such racism when his son wrote of his father, "*He blessed the Black man, dearly praying 'Lord, Wash that poor Soul; make him white by the Washing of thy SPIRIT.'*"³¹ There is nothing benign about such a statement. It's implications not only problematize Christian theology, but expose the degree to which racism has shaped Western Christianity. This is the foundation of the white American Christian church, both in its theology, formation, and practice.

In sum, then, Kendi states it clearly that racist ideas, and theologies, have created justifications for racist policies, practices, and structures of power when he says, "the root problem...has always been the self-interest of racist power....Powerful and brilliant intellectuals in the tradition of Gomes de Zurara then produced racist ideas to justify the racist policies of their era, to redirect blame for their era's racial inequalities away from those policies and onto people."³² Power is central to racism and racism is founded on racist ideas, as Kendi has already demonstrated. The perpetuation of powerful racist ideas permeated the formation of the United States, racial discrimination, and racist policies that abounded from racist ideas that then embodied actualized power.

It is simultaneously simple to describe the actualized power white people have been and still are afforded in the United States and yet to detail it would be an impossible

³¹ Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 76.

³² Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist*, 43.

and lengthy task. Therefore, what I believe is most helpful in describing the actualized, embodied power whites wield as a result of racist ideas is to illustrate the disparities between white and black people. To understand such disparities will demonstrate the reach of racialized power and thus segue to the prevalence of white supremacy in the United States and the white American Church.

It is essential to consider the words of Thomas Jefferson, “the man who penned the Declaration’s immortal words, ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal’.”³³ Who is included in “all men”? What do we make of such independence and freedom in the context of slave-holding colonies? What did equality mean to the founding fathers? Did he consider it on par with the half dozen slaveholding southern states that amended it to state instead, “All *freemen* are created equal”?³⁴ “What did it mean for Jefferson to call ‘liberty’ an ‘inalienable right’ when he himself enslaved people?”³⁵ These are important questions to consider because it reveals both the root of the actualized power at play in white supremacy and the disparities of white and black people in particular.

To explore even some of Jefferson’s writings about black people reveals his beliefs and intentions in his famous words in the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson stated clearly his belief that black people were intellectually inferior to whites, they felt less pain, they required less sleep though are disposed toward laziness, yet had the

³³ Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, 13.

³⁴ Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 105.

³⁵ Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 105.

audacity to state, “Nobody wishes more ardently [than me] to see an abolition [of slavery].”³⁶ His words echo today’s common occurrences of white people when they say, “I’m not racist, but...,” and then proceed to say something racist. It would be nice to think Jefferson’s words in the Declaration of Independence truly meant the equality and inclusion of all people, yet the incongruence of his words and actions mean something significant.

Of greatest significance in understanding the historical disparities and actualized power of whites over blacks in the United States is the Three-Fifths Compromise of 1787. In the Three-Fifths Compromise, representatives were seeking to gain legislative representative. As a way to gain greater representation and political power, the Three-Fifths Compromise was set forth as a negotiation proposed by a northern delegate, James Wilson, from Pennsylvania.³⁷ The Three-Fifths Compromise equated “enslaved Blacks to three-fifths of all other (white) persons.”³⁸ The Three-Fifths Compromise not only solidified the racist view that blacks were seen as sub-human to whites in the United States, as its vote succeeded by a landslide, but punctuated actualized, unconscious power of white people in the irony that an abolitionist, northern state would propose such a statement.

The Three-Fifths Compromise shoulders white supremacy’s actualized power through racial disparities embedded in America’s legacy. From the United States’

³⁶ Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 109-111.

³⁷ Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 116.

³⁸ Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 116.

beginnings of counting black people as less human to today's disparate statistics of mass incarceration of black people, white supremacy's racist ideas perpetuate disproportionate experiences. Even following the Emancipation Proclamation, blacks were hardly free from the oppression of white supremacy. Describing the Black Codes that emerged during the Reconstruction era, Hughes emphasizes the disparate reality blacks experienced, even in freedom in the United States:

Reconstruction only intensified the determination of southern whites to keep the formerly enslaved people 'in their place' which, for many whites, meant utter subservience and abject poverty. Once Reconstruction ended in 1877, the white South passed a series of Black Codes that sought to re-enslave African Americans — to make them 'slaves in everything but name,' as W.E.B. Du Bois put it. The codes forced blacks to sign labor contracts, binding them to long hours with little or no pay. The contracts functioned as proof of employment, and any black caught without that proof was typically arrested for vagrancy and auctioned to the highest bidder. Any form of protest, defiance, or even a plea for higher wages or better working conditions could trigger ruthless whippings. And as Carol Anderson explains, these codes "were not the work of extreme secessionists...[but were crafted by] some of the South's most respected judges, attorneys, and planters."³⁹

Reflecting on the enforcement of Black Codes and specifically the treatment of freed blacks found without proof of employment to the present-day disparity of white law enforcement officers killing unarmed black people, parrots the common white phrase to do as you are told or follow the commands of authority and then no harm will come. Yet it erases the racist implications and centers the privilege to possess that view, blame the victim, and shame him for not having power in the first place. After all the probability of an unarmed black man being shot by a police officers in the United States is about 3.5

³⁹ Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, 15-16.

times the likelihood of an unarmed white man.⁴⁰ One simply needs to look at incidents of police brutality against black people in 2020 alone, including Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Rayshard Brooks, and many others, as well as protestors objecting police brutality while ironically then met with increased instances of police brutality through “punching, kicking, gassing, pepper-spraying and driving vehicles at often peaceful protestors in states across the country.”⁴¹ White people have used their actualized power to oppress black people throughout U.S. history. The methods have changed, but the possession of power remains the same.

Political activist and scholar Angela Davis⁴² words in the 1990s accentuate the actualized power of white supremacy and the sheer disparities black people experience in the United States. Davis boldly stated, “African Americans are suffering the most oppression since slavery.”⁴³ After all, “African Americans possessed 1 percent of the

⁴⁰ Cody T. Ross, “A Multi-Level Bayesian Analysis of Racial Bias in Police Shootings at the County-Level in the United States,” *PLoS ONE* 10, no. 11 (2015), <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0141854>.

⁴¹ Adam Gabbatt, “Protests about police brutality are met with wave of police brutality across US,” *The Guardian*, June 6, 2020, accessed August 19, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jun/06/police-violence-protests-us-george-floyd>.

⁴² Other relevant works by Angela Davis include *Women, Race, and Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), *Women, Culture, and Politics* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), and *Freedom is a Constant Struggle* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2016).

⁴³ Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 444.

national wealth in 1990, after holding 0.5 percent in 1865, even as the Black population remained at around 10 to 14 percent during that period.”⁴⁴

Or to examine the racial disparities inversely, author, scholar, and multicultural educator Robin DiAngelo⁴⁵ in *White Fragility* provides staggering statistics from 2016-2017 of white power, “Ten richest Americans: 100 percent white; U.S. Congress: 90 percent white; U.S governors: 96 percent white; Top military advisors: 100 percent white.”⁴⁶ White supremacy’s effects are far-reaching, long lasting, and prevalent. White supremacy in its simplest form is power.

Prevalence: Noticing the Air We Breathe

In the foreword of activist, author and theologian Drew G. I. Hart’s⁴⁷ book, *Trouble I’ve Seen: Changing the Way the Church Views Racism*, Christena Cleveland affirms the author’s work in naming the “deadly but silent motivations that hover below our conscious awareness.”⁴⁸ To illuminate our unconscious bias and processing she states we are not as free and independent thinking as we would like to assume, and in fact our

⁴⁴ Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 444.

⁴⁵ Other relevant works by Robin DiAngelo include *What Does It Mean to be White?* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2016) and *Is Everyone Really Equal?* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2017).

⁴⁶ Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2018), 31.

⁴⁷ Other relevant works by Drew G. I. Hart include *Who Will Be a Witness?* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2020) and numerous articles featured in *The Christian Century*.

⁴⁸ Drew G. I. Hart, *Trouble I’ve Seen* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2016), 9.

racial lenses are greatly influenced by our social context.⁴⁹ Specifically, Cleveland describes a study led by Keith Payne, which confirms the racial stereotypes many people hold:

Payne and his research team began by exposing participants to either black or white male faces. (It is important to point out that the faces flashed on the computer screen so quickly that participants were unable to say that they had consciously seen them. But even when we can't consciously see something, we can still be affected by it.) Immediately after participants were exposed to either a black or white face, they were swiftly shown a picture of either a gun or a tool. Payne asked participants to determine whether they had just been presented with a gun or a tool. He observed that when participants had been exposed first to a black face and then to a tool, they were more likely to mistakenly identify the tool as a gun than when they were exposed first to a white face and then to a tool. Essentially, this study (and many, many others) demonstrates that the average person in the West automatically associates black men with danger and white men with safety and industriousness.⁵⁰

The results of Payne's research are important because they highlight the pervasiveness of white supremacy. They highlight the underlying, invisible nature of white supremacy. It proves the grim reality that, like the majority of individuals in the United States, Christians also "are held hostage to racism without even knowing it."⁵¹ White supremacy is infused in the history and formation of the United States as well as its development and current society and systems. It is, as Hughes states, "the very air we breathe."⁵² The white American Church must begin to notice the toxic air it is breathing, purify it from the

⁴⁹ Hart, *Trouble I've Seen*, 10.

⁵⁰ Hart, *Trouble I've Seen*, 10-11.

⁵¹ Hart, *Trouble I've Seen*, 11.

⁵² Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, 3.

toxins of unjust power and racist theology, and release from hostage particularly the Black Church in which it has segregated and severed from its fellowship.

Because of white supremacy's pervasiveness, no system, structure, or organization in the United States is immune to its presence. The institution and organization of white American Christian churches are not exempt — in fact it has long formed and sanctified the very racial structures that abound today.⁵³ Hughes illuminates its pervasiveness in white American Christianity when he states, “many [white] American Christians invoked divine approval in order to sanctify the cultural status quo” of white supremacy within the notion of establishing a Christian nation.⁵⁴ Therefore, it is no wonder Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. lamented on “Meet the Press” in 1960, “I think it is one of the tragedies of our nation...that eleven o'clock on Sunday morning is one of the most segregated hours...in Christian America.”⁵⁵ One could read King's words and simply lament that blacks and whites have been separated from worship for some benign, happenstance, or indiscriminate reason. But the fuller context of King's quote exposes the cutting depth of white supremacy and it is captured in his final statement to Ned Brooks when he said, “my church is not a segregating church. It's a segregated [church].”⁵⁶ To grasp the implications of King's statement is to grasp the problem. The American Church

⁵³ Stephen R. Haynes, *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3.

⁵⁴ Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, 92.

⁵⁵ Martin Luther King, Jr., “Meet the Press,” interview by Ned Brooks, *Meet the Press*, NBC, April 17, 1960, video.

⁵⁶ King, Jr., “Meet the Press,” interview by Ned Brooks.

has a race problem and specifically a problem of white supremacy infiltrating its practice, theology, mission, and organization.

Further, after a historical presidential campaign, Donald J. Trump was elected as President of the United States on November 9, 2016. There are many facets of both his experience and character that were surprising as a presidential candidate and certainly as a nominee. But what is even more surprising is his overwhelming support by white evangelicals, Christians well known for their more conservative values and expressed faith. Actions and beliefs not authentically espoused by the forty-fifth president simply confirmed by his sexist treatment of women, multiple extra-marital affairs, and overall greed — all clear vices named in Scripture. Regardless, white evangelicals not only supported him, but also did so by an extreme margin. Over 80% of white, evangelical Christians showed their support by casting their ballot in favor of Trump — “a fact that stunned many Americans since Trump’s personal values struck many as completely at odds with the historical values of the Christian faith.”⁵⁷ It is important to ask at this juncture, why white evangelicals supported him so overwhelmingly, what purpose did it serve for them? After all, we must again consider, “How can a movement ostensibly concerned with ‘family values’ support, a twice-divorced, thrice-married man who said that his ‘personal Vietnam’ was avoiding sexually transmitted diseases? How could evangelicals vote for someone who flaunted his infidelities and who boasted about his tawdry behavior toward women?”⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, 118.

⁵⁸ Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, 118

To find that answer we must go back to the 1950s. Hughes, in unearthing and tracing the history of the Great American Myths, describes how, in particular, the myth of America as a chosen and sovereign nation and the greatest myth of all of white supremacy collide in the 1950s that “epitomized for most white Americans a golden age of peace, prosperity, moral rectitude, and religious devotion.”⁵⁹ In fact it predated many cries for progress and equality, as it predated civil rights, voting rights, women’s rights, environmental concerns, and an increase of immigration.⁶⁰ For whites the 1950s solidified and interlocked Christian faith and virtuous American citizenship. Hughes describes this when he states, “In the 1950s, most whites never doubted that the United States was a Christian nation, standing for truth and right against ‘godless Communism.’ Armed with all those convictions, most whites in the 1950s never doubted that the United States stood innocent among the nations of the world.”⁶¹ But as the 1950s closed and the movements toward greater equality emerged during the 1960s, it also brought about a collective grieving among many white Protestant Christians, particularly evangelicals. The 1950s marked by Christian prominence and certainty, was now being questioned as to its significance and role in American life. Hughes uses sociologist Robert Bellah’s⁶²

⁵⁹ Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, 113.

⁶⁰ Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, 113

⁶¹ Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, 114.

⁶² Other relevant works by Robert N. Bellah include *Habits of the Heart* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), *The Good Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), and *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

description of the 1950s as “America’s third time of trial.”⁶³ The time of trial, as described by Hughes, “helped trigger the third disestablishment of the nation’s dominant religion — white, mainline, Protestant Christianity” and disestablishment happened specifically as younger people began to criticize the white American church as a religion marked by “the handmaid of racism and segregation, a willing partner in American imperialism in Southeast Asia, an actor in environmental destruction, and a bastion of prejudice against changing ethical norms.”⁶⁴ Such a movement spurred, in large part, the exit of traditional, established white American Christianity. Because of these changing American views and values, societal movements and circumstances, and the start of a growing exodus from the Church, many conservative evangelicals began a movement of restoration back to days gone by.

Going back to the question of why conservative evangelicals would vote in such large numbers for such an unlikely savior of their cause lies in the need and movement for restoration. For white evangelicals they desperately wanted to go back to a time where their influence was vast, their faith central, and most importantly (yet most insidiously) their power was unquestioned. That is why so many white evangelicals resonated with Trump’s slogan to Make America Great Again and to ‘take back’ the country.⁶⁵ As benign and patriotic as these slogans might appear to white American Christians, their implications of restoration and racist rhetoric are much more destructive.

⁶³ Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, 114.

⁶⁴ Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, 114.

⁶⁵ Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, 117.

It is these slogans and phrases that won the restorative-seeking conservative evangelicals to Trump's side as they sought to restore "their version of Christian morality [that] was [once] dominant."⁶⁶ Their prevailing support of Trump uncovers their pervasive desire to restore their anxieties about America's future and their "allegiance to the Myth of White Supremacy," a myth he centrally placed in his campaign.⁶⁷ Then shortly into his presidency, when he continued to perpetuate racist policies and sentiments, neo-Nazis flooded Charlottesville, Virginia and in Jefferson's home state the legacy of racism comes full circle as Trump, "placed white supremacists and those who protested white supremacy on the same moral plane."⁶⁸ Still his white evangelical following did not waver. Their pursuit of a restored Christian golden age of power clouded their moral convictions and firmly confirmed their commitment to the myth and prevalence of the gospel of white supremacy.

Polarity: Blinded by the White

But to engage in the conversation of white supremacy, even between white evangelicals and black evangelicals, the experience, convictions, and theology could not be more different in many cases and the two are likely to misunderstand one another. The reason for that is the polarity of experience white supremacy emits between white people and people of color. In Hughes' book, *Myths American Lives By*, he overtly states in the

⁶⁶ Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, 117.

⁶⁷ Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, 118.

⁶⁸ Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, 120.

first chapter the difference between the first edition of his book and the second. In stating the difference, he recalls being on a panel at the American Academy of Religion. While presenting on the contents of the first edition of his book and how these myths shape Americans (though not including white supremacy) and how they have shaped his personal “understanding of black people and of race relations in the United States” as a white man, he sat down and professor of African American Christianity and American religion, Dr. James Noel, leaned over and said to Hughes:

“Professor, you left out the most important of all the American myths.”

“And what might that be?” I [Hughes] inquired. “The Myth of White Supremacy,” Noel replied.⁶⁹

Hughes’ experience himself in researching and writing about the great myths that shape the United States and yet his failure to name white supremacy even as a white person who is seeking to dismantle racism cannot escape the power and prevalence of white supremacy. As a result, this exposes his vastly different experience and understanding of white supremacy than people of color. Such a differing experience is because, as I have quoted Hughes saying before, it is “like the very air we breathe: [white supremacy’s assumptions] surround us, envelop us, and shape us, [but it does so] in ways we seldom discern.”⁷⁰ Therefore, it is important to grasp the ways in which the problem of white supremacy is so polarizing in its experience. Hughes states is well when he says, “blacks and whites experience America in radically different ways, chiefly because the

⁶⁹ Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, 3.

⁷⁰ Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, 3.

Myth of White Supremacy defines life for blacks in terms that whites can barely grasp.”⁷¹

One must ask why people of color can describe and understand with great clarity the power and prevalence of white supremacy, yet white people still perceive it as a marginal, niche issue, if an issue at all.⁷²

The reason white supremacy is a peripheral issue for white people is white people have been blinded by the whiteness around them. In the United States white people exist in a normative culture that reflects and elevates their lived experience. White people are not described as white; however, people of color are described in relation to their anti-whiteness. My experience in white dominant culture in the United States means as a white woman, I can exist without discomfort or awareness — it is something I have the privilege of being unaware of only until I am in the presence of many people of color and then I notice the novelty of my race (maybe). Hughes quotes Georgetown University sociology professor, Michael Eric Dyson⁷³ when he says, “white identity [is] masked as universal, neutral and, therefore, quintessentially American.”⁷⁴ To be anything other than white in America is to be out of sync of the “natural” ordering of reality, society, and the American experience. This infiltration of white culture and the prioritizing of white culture is white supremacy.

⁷¹ Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, 9.

⁷² Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, 9.

⁷³ Other relevant works by Michael Eric Dyson include *Tears We Cannot Stop* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2017), *The Black Presidency* (Boston, MA: Mariner Books, 2017), and many more.

⁷⁴ Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, 21.

The racial unawareness of white people creates a polarized experience of white supremacy in the United States. Hughes describes the polarizing experience of white supremacy by sharing Hubert Locke's metaphor of white people and black people living on completely different planets and it's Locke's metaphor "that accurately depicts the gulf that lies between the lives and experiences of black Americans and their white counterparts."⁷⁵ White supremacy for black people is something transparent and easy to identify. For white people, however, it is an opaque lens that can only be deterged with the utmost intentionality. The definitive understanding of the prevalence of white supremacy for black Americans, yet the elusive nature to define and draw experiences of racism and white supremacy is its polarizing nature. White supremacy is absolute by its oppressed, yet abstract by its oppressors. It is seen as one of the most divisive topics for white people, yet people of color cannot afford to ignore truth telling that yields authentic unity. The experience of white supremacy by white people versus black people is so polarizing that its prevalence is grounded in its denial of it. To affirm the prevalence of white supremacy is to disregard the American way of life, as purported by the myth itself.

Another polarizing experience of white supremacy between white and black people is the experience of remembrance versus forgetfulness. When a white person begins to deconstruct their white power and privilege, one of the first experiences that lead to that awareness is a truthful look at history. In uncovering the vast, racist history of our country, white people begin to understand its prevalence. White people's awareness and deconstruction happen because white people have a sort of amnesia or (intentional)

⁷⁵ Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, 11.

forgetfulness about America's racist foundations and ideas. Conversely, black Americans have a keen remembrance of racist history in our country. They have a collective memory because of the perpetuation of their oppression and to keep the hope alive of true liberation and independence in the United States. The phenomenon of a polarizing memory exposes the extent of white privilege given to the powerful to remember history in a way that serves the powerful and retains their elevated status. To mandate history is to control it and to control it is power. Then when such dominant power and narrow history combine, they erase the notion of white supremacy to the dominant culture because the dominant experience history in a vacuum. Such an erasure then solidifies the myth of white supremacy's presence through a pursuit to deny and cover up its culpability. Hughes states it clearly, "we have hardened and absolutized into rigid orthodoxies from which we often permit little or no dissent."⁷⁶ Hughes' comment brings us full circle to the power of white supremacy.

Conclusion

The purpose of chapter one is two-fold. First, white supremacy is a problem and must be named. In chapter one I have stated unequivocally that white supremacy is a problem in the United States and in the American church. It is a problem that must be named and excavated to assess the layers of power and its permeation in the United States and the theological ideology of white American Christianity. I have also demonstrated that there are three particularities of white supremacy with the first being power. The power that white people hold in the United States is staggering and

⁷⁶ Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, 1.

continuing to name whiteness as power is essential. White supremacy's vociferous nature is also experienced so differently between white people and people of color. On the one hand it is so deafening to black Americans, yet its silence is so normative to white Americans, and the polarizing experience white people and black people experience cannot continue. While much of the history recounted in chapter one may be well known, to name the particularities is to exhume racism's legacy.

Second, igniting an imagination for a way forward is mandatory, especially for the authenticity and orthodoxy of the Christian faith to advance, because the legacy and continuation of white supremacy in the United States is the great antithesis of the Gospel and therefore its greatest threat. But in the 1990s a movement began that fueled a passion and imagination for the exact purpose of addressing white supremacy, name biblical inconsistencies perpetuated by racial segregation, and envision a fellowship of believers united in faith and grounded in diversity. The movement in churches to address racial injustice was the wider development of evangelical multiethnic churches. It is their births, developments, stories, triumphs, and failures we turn toward next in understanding the problem of white supremacy specifically in the evangelical American church and the attempt to forge a new way forward.

CHAPTER 2

THE PARTICULAR PROBLEM ENUMERATED: THE EMERGENCE OF THE MULTIETHNIC CHURCH AS A RESPONSE TO THE SIN OF RACISM AND THE PERPETUATION OF WHITE SUPREMACY IN THE EVANGELICAL MULTIETHNIC CHURCH AND AT THE SANCTUARY

“The culture and structures of interracial churches emulate those more commonly observed in white churches. Interracial churches tend to cater to the predilections of whites.”

–Dr. Korie Little Edwards, *The Elusive Dream*⁷⁷

“Wow! I did not realize that The Sanctuary was founded with the vision to be black-led. Sanctuary is such a unique church!” A new attender shared these words with me during a conversation about our church’s distinctions. There is partial truth in the statement. Research of multiethnic churches in 2013 shows that 71% were led by a white pastor.⁷⁸ Yet, more recent research shows that statistic is changing toward more black and Latino lead pastors in particular.⁷⁹ What is more, the multiethnic ecumenical movement

⁷⁷ Korie L. Edwards, *The Elusive Dream* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 117.

⁷⁸ Michael O. Emerson, “A New Day for Multiracial Congregations,” *Reflections Magazine: Yale Divinity School* (2013): <https://reflections.yale.edu/article/future-race/new-day-multiracial-congregations>.

⁷⁹ Adelle M. Banks, “More Multicultural Churches Led by Black, Hispanic Pastors,” *Christianity Today* (January 17, 2020): <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2020/january/more-multiracial-churches-black-hispanic-pastors-mosaix.html>.

began as a black-led, black-centered phenomenon in response to the sin of white supremacy in the United States and the American Church, which was detailed in chapter one. Yet, even in multiethnic church's founding vision statements, expressed values, diverse representation, and often minority-led churches, these congregations still perpetuate the very ills of white supremacy they seek to remedy. As noted by the opening epigraph, Korie Little Edwards,⁸⁰ sociologist of religion, confirmed in her research that while multiethnic churches, like The Sanctuary, emerged as a resolution to America's white supremacy problem and the intentional separation it caused, the problem of white normativity is actually perpetuated in these churches; thus, the problem described in chapter one continues.

Therefore, the broad purpose of chapter two is to provide a historical narrative of the particular multiethnic ecumenical movement that emerged to address the problem of white supremacy and the reality that the evangelical multiethnic church movement has actually perpetuated nuances of white dominant normativity and stalled the vision of multiethnic churches. With that purpose in mind, chapter two is organized in two major sections. The first section is a historical narrative of the emergence of the Christian multiethnic ecumenical movement and The Sanctuary's place in it. The second section states the form and function of the perpetuated problem of white supremacy in

⁸⁰ Other relevant works by Korie L. Edwards include *The Elusive Dream* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), *Against All Odds* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), and numerous academic articles featured in *Sociology of Religion* and *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*.

evangelical multiethnic churches and the significant impact on lead pastors and realizing their intended vision.

In the first section, this chapter aims to provide a larger historical narrative of the multiethnic church as a response to the problem of racial injustice in the United States, specifically the founding work of author, philosopher, theologian, pastor, and civil rights leader Dr. Howard Thurman,⁸¹ and its impact in the formation of multiethnic church creation. In framing the larger historical narrative of the multiethnic church movement, I will highlight individual profiles of black pastors who significantly shaped the trajectory of evangelical multiethnic churches and how these leaders' values and methodologies informed the values and methodologies of the eventual birth of The Sanctuary. The relationship between these leaders and The Sanctuary is simply formational—their trailblazing leadership, theological ideologies, missional practices, and historical trajectory within the movement of evangelical multiethnic church creation paved the way for The Sanctuary and its own birth and maturation. In the first section I will specifically highlight the lives of John Perkins, Tom Skinner, and Brenda Salter McNeil—black evangelical pastors championing racial justice in evangelicalism as a response to white supremacy. The purpose of providing a historical narrative is to both illustrate the trajectory of the multiethnic church movement in which to situate The Sanctuary and to uplift the significance of black pastors in the formation of the evangelical multiethnic church movement.

⁸¹ Howard Thurman's list of titles and impact are vast. Particular relevant works by Howard Thurman include *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1976) and *Footprints of a Dream* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1959).

The second task of the chapter, beyond delineating groundwork of the historical narrative of the evangelical multiethnic church movement as a response to the sin of racial injustice, is to name the more particular problem of white supremacy pervasive even in evangelical multiethnic churches purposed around the vision of dismantling such egregious power, including its particular manifestations at The Sanctuary. The section will articulate the granular problem of white supremacy in the multiethnic church and it will demonstrate that white normativity and dominance not only infiltrates even black-led multiethnic churches, like The Sanctuary, but it also thwarts its very vision of racial reconciliation and justice. The section will also expose the impact and strain black lead pastors in particular bear as they lead evangelical multiethnic churches infused with white hegemony. The chapter demonstrates particularly that the modern evangelical multiethnic church movement is situated in a historical narrative imagined and led by black Christian leaders seeking to address the problem of white supremacy in the United States and The Sanctuary is situated within a trajectory of justice. Yet, the movement has more nuanced problems of white dominance to address toward its intended vision of racial justice. Of particular importance in the chapter is the problem of white supremacy, namely white normativity, which is reproduced in an ecumenical environment created to remedy such omission. The problem of white dominance in the evangelical multiethnic church movement must be named and corrected.

A Brief Historical Narrative of the Multiethnic Church

Howard Thurman and the Creation of the Multiethnic Church Movement

In order to understand The Sanctuary's founding and vision, it is important to identify the larger history of multiethnic congregational development and life in America. There is no better person to start that historical review with than Howard Thurman, because, according to American religious historians, in 1944, he co-led the first intentionally multiethnic church in America in San Francisco called Church for the Fellowship of all Peoples.⁸² When Thurman co-founded Fellowship Church, it was a moment when the United States was entrenched in Jim Crow laws mandating racial segregation, lynching was a means of racial terrorism to uphold white supremacy, and the internment of Japanese Americans in concentration camps on the Pacific Coast ordered by President Franklin D. Roosevelt was upheld as constitutional and continued. Then globally with one war ending and another not too far away.⁸³ It was a time of great division, polarization, and antagonism; yet Thurman, along with a colleague, decided to bring people together in worship.

Thurman was known for his embrace of nonviolent action and social change rooted in his faith that influenced the young Baptist minister and civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr.⁸⁴ Beginning in 1944, Thurman led a peculiar and powerful

⁸² Herein referred to as Fellowship Church.

⁸³ Howard Thurman, *Footprints of a Dream: The Story of the Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1959), 11.

⁸⁴ Other relevant works by Martin Luther King, Jr. include *Stride Toward Freedom* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), *Strength to Love* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), *Why We Can't Wait* (New York: Signet, 2000), *Where Do We Go from Here* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2010) and many others, including sermons and speeches.

multiethnic congregation called Fellowship Church in San Francisco, CA.⁸⁵ It was the first integrated, multiethnic church at that time and was certainly revolutionary. Prior to his academic, religious, and literary achievement, however, Thurman was born and grew up in Daytona Beach, Florida, “into a segregated world in which the fear of violence and the reality of dehumanization were always present.”⁸⁶ Thurman was raised by his grandmother, Nancy Ambrose⁸⁷ His grandmother “was born a slave and lived until the Civil War on a plantation near Madison, Florida.”⁸⁸

Her life and faith impacted Thurman greatly. In fact, he would often read the Bible to her, reading the inspirational words in Psalms or the Gospels, but he was never allowed to read any of the Pauline letters.⁸⁹ In his college years when he inquired about such a restriction, she shared how during slavery the white slave master would bring in a white preacher to preach to his grandmother and other enslaved black people and each sermon exploited Paul’s words about slaves’ obedience to their earthly masters.⁹⁰ Thurman reflected on his need to consider “the problem her words presented.”⁹¹ In

⁸⁵ Linda Harrison McMullen, “Howard Thurman’s Journey to Community: A Study of the Church for the Fellowship of all Peoples 1943-1953” (PhD diss., Fielding Graduate University, 2019), ii.

⁸⁶ McMullen, “Howard Thurman’s Journey to Community: A Study of the Church for the Fellowship of all Peoples 1943-1953,” 14.

⁸⁷ Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1976), 19.

⁸⁸ Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 19.

⁸⁹ Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 19-20.

⁹⁰ Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 20.

response he states, “too often the weight of the Christian movement has been on the side of the strong and the powerful and against the weak and oppressed — this, *despite the gospel*.”⁹² Thurman’s quest was not simply to create a multiethnic church because segregation was not an ideal in his mind, but because racism is antithetical to the gospel of Jesus. He committed his education and vocation to revealing the true intent of Jesus’ holistic mission. Thurman continued his educational pursuit and attended Morehouse College, graduating as valedictorian, was ordained as a Baptist minister, completed seminary, served as pastor and dean at multiple institutions, taught, and wrote prolifically.⁹³ In between teaching roles, Thurman and white Presbyterian pastor, Dr. Alfred Fisk, co-founded Fellowship Church in 1944.⁹⁴

Together, Thurman and Fisk sought to develop “a worship center that reached across race, culture, faith tradition, and social status; and [increased] the effectiveness of the church in responding to social issues.”⁹⁵ Fellowship Church sought to embody his understanding of divine love between persons when Thurman wrote in *Jesus and the Disinherited*, “a man must love his neighbor directly, clearly, permitting no barriers

⁹¹ Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 20.

⁹² Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 20. Emphasis mine.

⁹³ McMullen, “Howard Thurman’s Journey to Community: A Study of the Church for the Fellowship of all Peoples 1943-1953,” 17.

⁹⁴ McMullen, “Howard Thurman’s Journey to Community: A Study of the Church for the Fellowship of all Peoples 1943-1953,” 25.

⁹⁵ McMullen, “Howard Thurman’s Journey to Community: A Study of the Church for the Fellowship of all Peoples 1943-1953,” 25.

between.”⁹⁶ Fellowship Church would be a groundbreaking expression of God’s love for humanity expressed through inclusive and barrier-breaking relationships situated in Thurman’s understanding of Jesus’ holistic mission.

Thurman believed Jesus’ message was not only a spiritual one, but also a social one. Jesus cared for the poor — those spiritually deprived of abundant life, but also those deprived of a basic quality of life. Thurman saw Jesus’ mission situated on freedom for all people through justice, especially those most marginalized in society. One can best understand his view of Jesus’ mission in his book, *Jesus and the Disinherited*.

Essentially, Thurman urges readers to consider a more authentic pursuit of the Gospel by understanding Jesus’ original mission and work:

The basic fact is that Christianity as it was born in the mind of this Jewish teacher and thinker appears as a technique of survival for the oppressed. That it became, through intervening years, a religion of the powerful and the dominant, used sometimes as an instrument of oppression, must not tempt us into believing that it was thus in the mind and life of Jesus.⁹⁷

Thurman demonstrates that the message and mission of Jesus was freedom and not continued subjugation of the powerless by the powerful in society. Jesus was unequivocally on the side of the marginalized and while Eurocentric Christianity in America has formed a theological guise of unbalanced power as biblical, Thurman’s words illustrate their falsity. Thurman illuminates the mission of Jesus in his words and illustrates the imperative to center the needs of the marginalized and work toward justice that liberates all people. Thurman’s understanding of Jesus’ mission demonstrates his

⁹⁶ Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 79.

⁹⁷ Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 18.

own mission in forming the first integrated, multiethnic church in the United States that sought to be a church centered on the freedom of all people. This is exactly the macro impetus for the founding of The Sanctuary.

The vision of The Sanctuary was not only to be a place of worship for a diverse group of people where spiritual needs were met, it was also to be a practical resource for immediate neighbors where social needs were met. The Sanctuary sought an authentic rendering of the Gospel, specifically Jesus' mission in Luke 4:14-21 where Jesus spoke in the synagogue in Nazareth words from Isaiah 61, stating his mission to proclaim the good news to the marginalized and declare liberation to those spiritually and socially deprived. Thurman's pursuit of Jesus' authentic mission was also the pursuit of The Sanctuary, although Thurman is not directly tied to that movement and The Sanctuary is not directly tied to Thurman. One notices, however, that Thurman's endeavor for multiethnic fellowship is a preceding model. Thurman's wisdom almost thirty years prior to Sanctuary's founding encouraged a similar pursuit toward racial justice in Christianity.

Thurman's legacy continued as he eventually was offered the role of chaplain of Marsh Chapel at Boston University.⁹⁸ While his departure from Fellowship Church was significant, Thurman would go on to teach, encourage, and mentor many students, including King. From King's influence and significance, he would inspire a movement of black religious leaders to continue the work of Gospel-centered reconciliation and multiethnic ministry. Thurman's trailblazing vision in the 1940s and 50s continued into

⁹⁸ McMullen, "Howard Thurman's Journey to Community: A Study of the Church for the Fellowship of all Peoples 1943-1953," 26.

the 60s and 70s through emerging evangelical leaders. While Thurman and King were not evangelicals, their support of integration at the time impacted the eventual birth and legacy of the evangelical multiethnic church movement by faithful, dedicated, tireless leaders like John Perkins, Tom Skinner, and Brenda Salter McNeil. Thurman and King paved the way forward for contemporary leaders of the modern evangelical multiethnic movement, including The Sanctuary.

Racial justice is linked to the gospel in the Thurman-King legacy, with Thurman enacting justice through congregational life and King extending his teacher's reach to beyond the congregation to the society at large. Thurman's racial justice plays out at the level of congregant-to-congregant and King unfolds as citizen-to-citizen. The three leaders — Perkins, Skinner, and McNeil — adopt and adapt the commitment to multiethnic ecumenical fellowship by enacting it differently in their work. Perkins furthers it through his work in Christian community development, Skinner furthers it by expanding the meaning of evangelism in contrast to largely white, narrow evangelicalism of the time, and McNeil furthers it within an academic frame and deepening of evangelicalism's understanding of racial reconciliation and her intentional intersection of sexism and racism. The next section nuances these differences and similarities as necessary elements in the larger history of multiethnic churches in the United States broadly, but related to Sanctuary in particular.

*John Perkins and the Emergence of the Evangelical Multiethnic Church Linked with
Community Development*

Dr. John M. Perkins,⁹⁹ minister, author, community developer, and activist, grew up in rural Mississippi in the 1930s and 40s.¹⁰⁰ He had a difficult childhood due to the death of his mother when he was only an infant, the abandonment of his father, and growing up in significant poverty with his grandmother.¹⁰¹ About the time Thurman co-founded Fellowship Church, young Perkins was experiencing the very real and horrific racism in the Deep South through means of violence when his brother “was shot and killed by a policeman outside the black entrance to a movie theater.”¹⁰² It was through experiences like witnessing his brother’s death by police and living in poverty he realized racism’s power and that he was on the losing side of it. Racism’s power, as Perkins described it, was particularly frightening because in his upbringing, as is common across the United States, “whites controlled the power. [For Perkins], the constant threat and actuality of violence were clear indicators of this power.”¹⁰³ Eventually, Perkins left Mississippi for success and a new start in California with his wife, Vera Mae.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Other relevant works by John Perkins includes *Let Justice Roll Down* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), *Dream with Me* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2018), *Beyond Charity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), and *With Justice for All* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011).

¹⁰⁰ Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 52.

¹⁰¹ Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 52.

¹⁰² Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 52.

¹⁰³ Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 52.

¹⁰⁴ Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 53.

However, Perkins, growing in his call to minister and address societal systemic inequities, eventually moved back to his hometown in Mississippi to pastor and “live out reconciliation” by addressing “the divisions among black and whites, the poor and rich, the powerless and the powerful.”¹⁰⁵

He believed his life’s calling was to truly be a neighbor to those in his hometown community. Motivated by his faith, Perkins believed segregation, racism, and oppression could be dismantled through the power of the Gospel, and in fact it had to if the Gospel is the Good News evangelicals claim it to be.¹⁰⁶ Therefore, Perkins, in his book, *With Justice for All*, shares his vision for Christian community development as the three Rs: *relocation, reconciliation, and redistribution*.¹⁰⁷ Relocation for Perkins meant that if he was to address the felt needs of the poor, then he believed he must relocate to live in that neighborhood or community of need.¹⁰⁸ Reconciliation to Perkins was two-fold. First, it was the Gospel imperative of reconciliation of people back to God from the result of sin and second, it included reconciliation between people across barriers such as “racial, cultural, and economic barriers” and such person-to-person reconciliation “is not an optional aspect of the gospel.”¹⁰⁹ Finally, redistribution includes, “sharing our skills,

¹⁰⁵ Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 53.

¹⁰⁶ John Perkins, *With Justice for All: A Strategy for Community Development* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1982), 30.

¹⁰⁷ Perkins, *With Justice for All*, 55-56.

¹⁰⁸ Perkins, *With Justice for All*, 55.

¹⁰⁹ Perkins, *With Justice for All*, 55.

time, our energy, and our gospel in ways that empower people to break out of the cycle of poverty and assume responsibility for their own needs” and to “organize business enterprises within the community of need that will be owned by a broad base of people” with the goal of being “a more equitable distribution of resources.”¹¹⁰

Perkins practiced and embodied the vision of the three Rs in his own life by not simply espousing a vision for Christian community development through the three Rs, but practicing it in his own life. He lived out the values of the three Rs by relocating back to his hometown to develop holistic Christian community, practice racial reconciliation within his own interpersonal and ecumenical relationships, and modeling redistribution by sharing the gifts and talents he had with others in his community. Through his work many churches began to live out the reality of his dream that the church would proclaim the Good News to the lost, poor, and hurting in the world.¹¹¹ Perkins’ legacy of the evangelical multiethnic, reconciling movement continues today as he still writes, speaks, organizes, leads, and fosters a Gospel-centered mandate of justice.

Similarly, The Sanctuary’s vision intended to address the systemic inequalities and social disparities in North Minneapolis because of the contextual needs in North Minneapolis. Within Minneapolis, North Minneapolis is a particular geographic area within the broader city. It is a rich and diverse community, home to marginalized people groups for generations. More recently since the 1960s, it is the historical geographic center of Minneapolis’ black community. Due to white supremacy, it has been a

¹¹⁰ Perkins, *With Justice for All*, 56.

¹¹¹ Perkins, *With Justice for All*, 99.

historically segregated section of Minneapolis, specifically after Interstate-94 was erected right at the border of North Minneapolis in 1984, essentially isolating it from the rest of the city. Due to the installment of I-94 as a segregating measure, North Minneapolis' inequities grew through perpetuated measures of intentional, systemic racism, higher rates of violence, greater reports of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), under-performing schools, and a stunted developing infrastructure ill-resourced to address these issues caused by racism.¹¹²

Therefore, due to The Sanctuary's contextual location and value to address the whole needs of its fellow Northside neighbor, The Sanctuary also launched in tandem with the church a Christian community development corporation, called The Sanctuary CDC. While a community development corporation in conjunction with a church plant was a unique model, recounting the emergence of Christian community development through Perkins's example illuminates that it was not unique to The Sanctuary, and instead is a continuation in the historical narration of a black-led multiethnic ecumenical movement. The purpose of launching The Sanctuary CDC was to provide holistic, local ministry to the community of North Minneapolis.¹¹³ Specifically, the initial vision for The Sanctuary CDC was to meet "the holistic needs, spirit, soul, and body of our surrounding community and global neighbors."¹¹⁴ The vision to meet holistic needs of

¹¹² John Coifman, "North Minneapolis: Echoes of the Unrest in 1967," *Star Tribune*, Nov 18, 2015, accessed August 6, 2019, <http://www.startribune.com/north-minneapolis-echoes-of-the-unrest-in-1967/351540861/>.

¹¹³ Smith, "The Sanctuary Covenant Church: An Urban, Christ-centered, Holistic, and Multi-ethnic Church," 2.

neighbors was influenced by Thurman's teachings of Jesus' holistic mission and through the practical example of Perkins. On paper and in conversation the vision for The Sanctuary by Rev. Dr. Efrem Smith, founder of The Sanctuary, quickly came to life by incorporating the principles and learnings from Thurman and Perkins.

The Sanctuary and The Sanctuary CDC's vision and ministry were novel and unique to many in those early years. It was a new church, a new collaboration with a CDC nonprofit, and a new and compelling vision, and yet it also echoed the work of past black leaders, specifically evangelical black leaders, who had paved the way and compelled leaders like Smith toward Christian racial reconciliation and community development. In particular, Smith's vision greatly mirrored and continued the initial contribution of Perkins' philosophy of the 3 Rs.

While Smith did not need to relocate to North Minneapolis to plant The Sanctuary, both Smith and Perkins grew up where they planted and invested their ministries. Smith grew up in North Minneapolis and was committed to the empowerment and advancement of his community.¹¹⁵ He similarly believed as Perkins did that proximity to the poor and relevant ministering to neighbors' deepest felt needs were central to the work of discipleship.¹¹⁶ While it was not required of other staff or

¹¹⁴ Smith, "The Sanctuary Covenant Church: An Urban, Christ-centered, Holistic, and Multi-ethnic Church," 3.

¹¹⁵ Smith, "The Sanctuary Covenant Church: An Urban, Christ-centered, Holistic, and Multi-ethnic Church," 8.

¹¹⁶ Smith, "The Sanctuary Covenant Church: An Urban, Christ-centered, Holistic, and Multi-ethnic Church," 4.

congregants to live in North Minneapolis, intentional engagement in the community was paramount to authentic ministry and realization of The Sanctuary's vision.

The second "R" in Perkin's philosophy was reconciliation, which was central to Smith's vision for The Sanctuary. Smith often quoted Revelation 7:9-12 in describing the vision of The Sanctuary. In envisioning a diverse, multiethnic, multilingual magnitude of people praising God, Smith often encouraged The Sanctuary to be a "sneak preview of heaven" — a snapshot of the diversity, unity, and shared fellowship that would compel and "call humanity to oneness."¹¹⁷ Both Perkins and Smith preached widely about the reconciliatory opportunity humans have with God and in turn, with one another.¹¹⁸ Such an evangelistic message and invitation to human oneness reflected their central understanding of the Gospel of Jesus. It was a relational and reciprocal imperative for faith in Jesus. That call to oneness reflected their view of humanity's mutual need for one another.¹¹⁹

A mutual need for one another is reflected in the final "R" of Perkins' philosophy, which is redistribution. Perkins stated that, "Christ calls us to share with those in need."¹²⁰ It was vital to Perkins that in our work toward reconciliation and mutuality, just practices that meet felt needs of people in the community is imperative. In fact, Perkins

¹¹⁷ Smith, "The Sanctuary Covenant Church: An Urban, Christ-centered, Holistic, and Multi-ethnic Church," 5.

¹¹⁸ Perkins, *With Justice for All*, 55.

¹¹⁹ Perkins, *With Justice for All*, 55.

¹²⁰ Perkins, *With Justice for All*, 56.

broadened evangelism not simply sharing the spiritual liberation of Jesus, but also the “call for an evangelism that touches people where they live — one that speaks to their felt needs.”¹²¹ Smith’s words in The Sanctuary’s founding vision echoed Perkins’ principle of redistribution through his desire for The Sanctuary, and specifically The Sanctuary CDC, to be “a force of evangelism in the city through holistic outreach.”¹²² While The Sanctuary’s church vision to be a multiethnic church was unique, it was also the formation of The Sanctuary CDC that set it apart completely. Smith’s decision was an integral decision based on The Sanctuary’s vision to address racial injustice in their neighborhood through a Christian community development corporation in the inner city. The Sanctuary was planted and grew out of the labor of African American leaders like Perkins.

Smith continued the important work of black pastors like Perkins, who were committed to the work of racial reconciliation, by utilizing their context-driven philosophies and learning for how to create multiethnic congregations in spaces in which they are largely nonexistent. Smith’s reason for starting a CDC in conjunction to the planting of Sanctuary was to be a means of holistic evangelism linked with the work of the local church, emphasized in Perkins’ example. The emphasis of holistic evangelism that was so central to The Sanctuary’s founding vision is a continuation of the leadership and intellect of black evangelical pastors before Smith. In particular is Tom Skinner, a

¹²¹ Perkins, *With Justice for All*, 56-57.

¹²² Smith, “The Sanctuary Covenant Church: An Urban, Christ-centered, Holistic, and Multi-ethnic Church,” 4.

well-known evangelist and preacher, who preached parallel messages about the importance of urban ministries widening the view of evangelism to include the care, compassion, and justice of the least of these in their community — something that was radical to normative Eurocentric evangelical ideology at the time. The Sanctuary stands on the shoulders of Skinner’s teaching and emphasis on holistic evangelism.

Tom Skinner and the Commitment to Holistic Evangelism

The life and story of minister and evangelist Tom Skinner¹²³ is one of transformation in an extraordinary display of both spiritual rebirth, racial reconciliation, and holistic evangelism. Born in Harlem in New York City, Skinner was the son of a pastor and eventual member and leader of a notorious gang called the Harlem Lords.¹²⁴ Rising through the ranks of the gang, he was planning a substantial act of violence in the city one day, when he heard the Gospel preached in a new and transformative way. That night he accepted Christ as his Savior, immediately turned from his leadership and involvement in the Harlem Lords, and even converted some of his fellow gang members. As a born-again evangelical Christian, he committed his life to serving the Lord and eventually was trained as a pastor and evangelist, a writer and proponent of racial reconciliation, and traveled the country sharing the message of Christ-centered justice and reconciliation.¹²⁵ He was committed to sharing the truth of the state of racism in the

¹²³ Other relevant works by Tom Skinner include *Black and Free* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1968) and *How Black is the Gospel* (Washington, DC: Skinner Leadership Institute, 2016), and numerous sermons.

¹²⁴ Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 53.

¹²⁵ Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 53-54.

United States, rooted in his understanding of the Gospel through his faith in Jesus.¹²⁶ In particular, most notable was his passion for evangelism through his preaching on racial reconciliation and justice.

In his address at the Urbana Conference in 1970, Skinner recounted the history of racism and in doing so the silence of white evangelicals in the midst of America's racist history.¹²⁷ In fact the reason many white evangelicals did not get involved in the injustice of racism was because it was a social issue. Skinner recounted many white evangelicals' distaste in getting involved in racism when white evangelicals would argue, "we must deliver the Word. We must save people's souls. We must not get involved in the issue of liberating people from the chains of slavery. If they accept Jesus Christ as their Savior, by and by they will be free — over there."¹²⁸ But Skinner implored evangelicals to a holistic gospel, a holistic view of outreach. Unequivocally he implored outreach and evangelism be holistic — serving people's spiritual and social needs:

There is no possible way you can talk about preaching the gospel if you do not want to deal with the issues that bind people. If your gospel is an "either-or" gospel, I must reject it. Any gospel that does not talk about delivering to [humanity] a personal savior who will free him from the personal bondage of sin and grant him eternal life and does not at the same time speak to the issue of enslavement, does not speak to the issue of injustice, does not speak to the issue of inequality — any gospel that does not want to go where people are hungry and poverty-stricken and set them free in the name of Jesus Christ is not the gospel.

¹²⁶ Tom Skinner, *Black and Free* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1968), 125.

¹²⁷ Urbana Conference, "The U.S. Racial Crisis and World Evangelism," Urbana Student Missions Conference, last modified 2020, <https://urbana.org/message/us-racial-crisis-and-world-evangelism>.

¹²⁸ Urbana Conference, "The U.S. Racial Crisis and World Evangelism."

Skinner's words at Urbana in 1970 demonstrate the imperative for churches to meet not only the spiritual needs of people, but also the physical and social needs of people. Skinner's challenge in the 1970s for evangelicals to broaden their understanding of evangelism began an important distinctive.

As The Sanctuary was founded, its vision of outreach and evangelism paired with justice and compassion echoed Skinner's understanding of holistic justice and thus The Sanctuary extended Skinner's ideology of evangelism. Smith specifically echoed Skinner's ideology when he stated, The Sanctuary was also to be a "force of evangelism in the city through holistic outreach."¹²⁹ Smith intended to "take a holistic approach to outreach and evangelism."¹³⁰ The Sanctuary would "be concerned about the whole person" — their spiritual well-being and social and physical well-being.¹³¹ The Sanctuary's vision echoed Skinner's words at Urbana back in 1970. To illustrate The Sanctuary's holistic approach to ministry further, Smith wrote in the founding vision of The Sanctuary that "[Sanctuary] must live in the balance, tension, and ministry methods of Jesus, by being holistic as we care about the whole person, spirit, soul, and body. I believe a commitment to wholeness in our approach to evangelism and outreach will

¹²⁹ Smith, "The Sanctuary Covenant Church: An Urban, Christ-centered, Holistic, and Multi-ethnic Church," 4.

¹³⁰ Smith, "The Sanctuary Covenant Church: An Urban, Christ-centered, Holistic, and Multi-ethnic Church," 4.

¹³¹ Smith, "The Sanctuary Covenant Church: An Urban, Christ-centered, Holistic, and Multi-ethnic Church," 4.

enable a person to truly see themselves as made in the very image of God.”¹³² A holistic approach to evangelism was exactly Skinner’s emphasis as well. Both Skinner and Smith saw Jesus’ message as holistic. Both were also committed to the Bible’s central teaching of reconciliation. The distinction of holistic evangelism within an evangelical congregation was propositioned by Skinner and continued through Smith’s vision of The Sanctuary through its ministry in North Minneapolis.

Brenda Salter McNeil and the Development of Racial Reconciliation in Evangelicalism and Its Inclusion of Racial and Gender Justice

Leading and shaping the multiethnic, reconciling movement of evangelical churches in some of the most significant ways in the early twenty-first century is author, educator, and pastor Brenda Salter McNeil.¹³³ McNeil, in relation to The Sanctuary, has been impactful in two particular ways. First, she has contributed some of the most substantive works in describing and making a case for racial reconciliation within evangelicalism. Second, she has purposefully intersected racial and gender justice, which influenced the movement of evangelical multiethnic churches, including The Sanctuary. In her intersection of racial and gender justice she implored, through her influence in the movement, that the evangelical multiethnic movement includes female voices, theologies,

¹³² Smith, “The Sanctuary Covenant Church: An Urban, Christ-centered, Holistic, and Multi-ethnic Church,” 5.

¹³³ Other relevant works by Brenda Salter McNeil include *A Credible Witness* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008), *The Heart of Racial Justice* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009), *Roadmap to Reconciliation 2.0* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2020), *Becoming Brave* (Ada, MI: Brazos Press, 2020) and numerous sermons.

and ideologies. She is one of the most prominent black female scholars in the area of social justice within evangelicalism and has written some of the most well-known books on racial reconciliation in the movement. She teaches Reconciliation Studies at Seattle Pacific University and directs a reconciliation program there, is on the pastoral team at Quest Church in Seattle, Washington, and is ordained in the Evangelical Covenant Church.¹³⁴

McNeil has dedicated her vocation to helping evangelicals connect the dots between the faith they espouse and the God of justice they worship toward a richer theology of reconciliation. In short, racial reconciliation to McNeil is not an add on to the Gospel, but is central to it. Clinical psychologist, public theologian, and pastor Dr. Chanequa Walker-Barnes,¹³⁵ another prominent black female scholar working in the area of Christianity and racial justice, in arguing for reconciliation's centrality in Christianity says, "reconciliation is our central mission as Christians, reconciliation becomes the primary theme through which we read and interpret Scripture."¹³⁶ Walker-Barnes goes on to quote Salter McNeil's imperative of reconciliation in the Bible when she refers to reconciliation as "the cultural mandate" to fill the earth in Genesis 1:28.¹³⁷ Reconciliation

¹³⁴ Brenda Salter McNeil, "About Dr. Brenda," Dr. Brenda Salter McNeil, last modified 2019, <https://www.saltermcneil.com/about-dr-brenda>.

¹³⁵ Other relevant works by Chanequa Walker-Barnes include *Too Heavy a Yoke* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014) and *I Bring the Voices of My People* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019).

¹³⁶ Chanequa Walker-Barnes, *I Bring the Voices of My People* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019), 210.

¹³⁷ Walker-Barnes, *I Bring the Voices of My People*, 210.

is a theological imperative for McNeil and from her rich theological work in the evangelical multiethnic church movement, it has impacted The Sanctuary in also developing a thick, substantive theology of racial reconciliation.

McNeil's theological contribution to the evangelical multiethnic church movement included particularly a deepened understanding and centralization of reconciliation to include both individual faith and connection to one's neighbor. McNeil's theological development of the evangelical understanding of reconciliation went beyond a Christian's restored, individual relationship with God, but included an imperative to one's neighbor. McNeil's deepening of reconciliation enriched the evangelical belief of personal salvation to include a communal and social imperative that Eurocentric evangelicalism did not widely espouse. McNeil has challenged and stretched evangelicalism's form of personal salvation as reconciliation with God that cares solely about the soul status of an individual, and instead to a more substantive understanding that reconciliation with God is deeper than receiving access to eternal life in heaven one day, and also requires a whole-life transformation and extends to the good of one's neighbor.

In 2008, McNeil wrote the book, *A Credible Witness*. McNeil's book began by stating the evangelical theological understanding of reconciliation to God and further developed it to also relate to reconciliation with others where barriers of gender, race, and class impede fellowship and God's mission on earth. McNeil's ideological and theological perspective mirrored The Sanctuary through its original vision statement to be

a reconciling movement, “to reconcile the people of the city to God and one another.”¹³⁸ McNeil’s work, including more recently, *Roadmap to Reconciliation*, was widely read, discussed, and utilized in the early formative years at The Sanctuary. Her work has brought particular depth to the theological formation of racial reconciliation at The Sanctuary and the church where she pastors, Quest Church in Seattle, WA, continues to be a sister church to The Sanctuary.

While McNeil provided rich theological resources, The Sanctuary utilized as it formed and framed its theological imperative for racial reconciliation and justice, McNeil’s unapologetic and groundbreaking intersection of racial justice and gender justice impacted the male-dominated leadership of evangelicalism. Her example also impacted The Sanctuary in its own theological view on gender issues and its inclusion of women in ministry. Before McNeil, the general topic of reconciliation within evangelism was largely centered on race and the impacts of racism in the Church and world. But through McNeil’s pastoral and academic contributions, she made a clear case that evangelicals, in their pursuit of racial justice, must also consider gender justice as central to the Bible’s teaching and the Church’s missional priorities. The Sanctuary followed McNeil’s modeling and teaching to incorporate women into the planning and positioned in places of leadership as priorities of the church. McNeil’s writings on the value of women in ministry and the imperative to consider their theological perspective were

¹³⁸ Smith, “The Sanctuary Covenant Church: An Urban, Christ-centered, Holistic, and Multi-ethnic Church,” 4.

incorporated as a value at The Sanctuary and remain a distinctive of this evangelical church.

Overall, McNeill has pursued a theologically deep understanding of racial reconciliation and integrated an intersectional approach to racial and gender justice in evangelical multiethnic churches. The Sanctuary remains a learner and student of her work and partner in her theological and ideological advances toward racial and gender justice in evangelicalism.

Learnings from the Historical Narrative of the Multiethnic Church

Since the emergence of evangelical multiethnic churches in the 1990s and 2000s and the historical impact of the above leaders, diverse churches have grown to make up 15-16 percent of evangelical churches in 2018.¹³⁹ The pioneering faithfulness of Christian leaders such as Thurman and King impacted specifically evangelical black leaders in the late-20th and early-21st century toward such a statistical impact on evangelicalism, as evidenced above. But again, Thurman and King were not evangelicals, but instead, because of their support of integration, Thurman and King were founders of a movement that eventually inspired black evangelical religious leaders to continue the work of racial justice in multiethnic ministry. It is within the above historical trajectory that Smith

¹³⁹ Kevin D. Dougherty and Michael O. Emerson, “The Changing Complexion of American Congregations,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 57, no. 1 (June 2018): 24-38.

continued the vision of “an urban, Christ-centered, holistic, and multi-ethnic church” in North Minneapolis through the founding and fruition of The Sanctuary in 2003.¹⁴⁰

As evidenced above, Thurman’s innovation and legacy began a movement that impacted King. From his leadership and spiritual conviction that mobilized the Civil Rights Movement, the above evangelical leaders of multiethnic, reconciling Gospel-centered ministry advanced into the 1990s and early 2000s. It is the shared conviction, inspiration, faith, and fortitude to racial reconciliation of these three black evangelical leaders detailed above that made the vision and birth of The Sanctuary possible. The Sanctuary stands on the shoulders of Perkins, Skinner, and McNeil, including other black, evangelical leaders, pastors, and scholars not mentioned. There is much to learn from them. But very practically, and also of utmost importance for this project, were Perkins, Skinner, and McNeil’s common, broad experiences living in the United States and how that informed their understanding of and leadership within the movement of racial justice and evangelicalism. Sociologists on race and religion Michael O. Emerson¹⁴¹ and Christian Smith¹⁴² in *Divided by Faith* name clearly these commonalities of Perkins, Skinner, and McNeil:

¹⁴⁰ Smith, “The Sanctuary Covenant Church: An Urban, Christ-centered, Holistic, and Multi-ethnic Church,” 1.

¹⁴¹ Other relevant works by Michael O. Emerson include *People of the Dream* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), *Transcending Racial Barriers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), *Blacks and Whites in Christian America* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), and *United by Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹⁴² Other relevant works by Christian Smith include *To Flourish or Destruct* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015), *The Bible Made Impossible* (Ada, MI: Brazos

They shared some common characteristics. They were all black, all well versed — through experience — in the racialized United States, all willing to use the term *evangelical* and associate with white evangelicals, all influenced by Martin Luther King (some were personal friends of King), all committed to mentoring future leaders, and all completely sold on the idea that reconciliation was, in Samuel Hines terms, ‘God’s one-item agenda.’¹⁴³

Emerson and Smith’s statement regarding Perkins, Skinner, and McNeil is important because it reveals their shared experience and convictions. Their shared experience and convictions are significant for three reasons in relation to this project. First, it illuminates the emergence and continuation of the multiethnic, reconciliation-centered church in the early twenty-first century, which *The Sanctuary* finds its own emergence. Second, it shows the impact of evangelicalism on the development of multiethnic churches. Third, and most important to this project, it highlights the leadership of black evangelical Christian pastors leading the emergence and continuation of evangelical multiethnic churches.

But of particular importance is why they were, as black evangelicals, compelled to reconciliation. Emerson and Smith state in the quote above that it was through their individual experience as black people as the impetus for their work in reconciliation. It is important to consider chapter one for a moment and the experience of polarity in white supremacy. I stated that black and white people experience the power of white supremacy in very different ways based on its system, function, and privilege. Therefore, the importance of black evangelicals leading and forming racial reconciliation movement

Press, 2012), and *American Evangelicalism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

¹⁴³ Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 54.

through the multiethnic church cannot be understated. Through lived experience, black evangelicals have experienced the power of white supremacy, saw it was antithetical to the authentic message of Jesus, and therefore began an important movement in the Church. The start of such a movement by black evangelicals in particular is of utmost significance, because it is through their particular experience of racism and the Gospel's message of reconciliation that informs the formation of the evangelical multiethnic church. Said another way, white people can lead in the work of reconciliation, but they are void of the experience of oppression by racism and that means something significant to the leadership and mission of the movement. Black evangelicals' voice is imperative in the multiethnic church. In particular, the leadership of specific black evangelicals' continual faithfulness that slowly but surely birthed the multiethnic church movement within evangelicalism.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, the evangelical multiethnic church movement started at a meager number; "only 5.5% of Christian churches were multiracial, defined as having no more than 80% of a single racial group."¹⁴⁴ Yet as small as that number was, it not only quickly grew, but its biblical imperative and vision deeply impacted many people, primarily younger evangelicals at the time.¹⁴⁵ A trend began to emerge within the development of evangelical multiethnic churches. While existing churches began to

¹⁴⁴ Kathleen Garces-Foley, "Evangelical Churches Crossing the Ethnic Divide," *Historically Speaking* 9, no 6 (July, August 2008): 22, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/419921/pdf>.

¹⁴⁵ Garces-Foley, "Evangelical Churches Crossing the Ethnic Divide," 23.

revise their vision statements and propose shifts toward multiethnic churches, it was these younger evangelicals in the 1990s and 2000s that started to plant “their own churches designed to attract other young people who value diversity” and a biblical and theological centering of racial reconciliation.¹⁴⁶ These new church plants began and flourished “with an original vision to be multiethnic,” because they found it was too difficult to make changes toward diversity in established churches, and growth happened quickly.¹⁴⁷ The Sanctuary is a part of the growing collective of evangelical multiethnic churches.

The Sanctuary’s Birth and Development

Before founding The Sanctuary, Smith and his wife, Donecia, gathered close friends in the basement of their friend’s house on Super Bowl XXXVII, January 26, 2003, during the half-time show to share a vision. It was then Smith shared the vision of what would become The Sanctuary — “an urban, Christ-centered, holistic, and multi-ethnic church.”¹⁴⁸ The Sanctuary would seek to be a reconciling movement, reconciling the people of the city of Minneapolis to God and one another. Smith’s vision was a bold one given that The Sanctuary is situated in largely white Minnesota, even if it is particularly situated in the geographic center of the black community in North Minneapolis. Given the historical and present-day racial tensions in North Minneapolis,

¹⁴⁶ Garces-Foley, “Evangelical Churches Crossing the Ethnic Divide,” 23.

¹⁴⁷ Garces-Foley, “Evangelical Churches Crossing the Ethnic Divide,” 23.

¹⁴⁸ Smith, “The Sanctuary Covenant Church: An Urban, Christ-centered, Holistic, and Multi-ethnic Church,” 1.

one might assume The Sanctuary's vision would be anything but attractive.¹⁴⁹ But within a few short years between the now infamous Super Bowl Sunday in 2003, its launch, and first years of ministry, The Sanctuary grew quickly to over one thousand regular attendees. No one expected growth so quickly, especially for a ministry centered on a peculiar yet necessary vision of multiethnicity in such a segregated part of the city.

The Sanctuary was deeply committed to its vision of multiethnicity and racial reconciliation and yet it experienced, like many other multiethnic churches, the pervasiveness of white supremacy in the form of perpetuating white normative organizational practices and prioritizing white religio-cultural norms. While The Sanctuary experienced the realities of white supremacy, it was not the error of the black leaders or congregants, but the reality of white congregants growing in their racial understanding, facing historical and perpetuated racism, and identifying the power of white supremacy (many for the first time, or at least early in their awareness) through The Sanctuary's vision and their commitment to their faith. The Sanctuary has been and continues to be a church committed to truth-telling and bridge-building through its audacious and crucial vision, which is situated within the above detailed historical narrative. The Sanctuary is what it is today because of the incredible legacy of committed leaders, specifically black pastors, like Smith, who had a vision for reconciliation in the context of his neighborhood.

¹⁴⁹ Christopher Ingraham, "Racial Inequality in Minneapolis is Among the Worst in the Nation," *The Washington Post*, May 30, 2020, accessed September 14, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/05/30/minneapolis-racial-inequality>.

The Sanctuary celebrated 17 years since that Super Bowl Sunday on January 26, 2020. Since then good and holistic ministry has happened at The Sanctuary. While the above profiles highlighted the similarities and influences those leaders had on the birth and formation of The Sanctuary, there were distinctives that set Sanctuary apart. Two distinctives in particular are worth noting.

First, The Sanctuary was founded and continues to lead with a clear commitment to prioritizing young people. Smith was a youth pastor before leading The Sanctuary as senior pastor and his love for young people informed the formation of The Sanctuary. In fact, Smith wrote a book called *Raising Young Heroes: Developing A Revolutionary Youth Ministry* on the importance of young people's place in the church. In his book he writes, "I want [young people] to see the church as a refuge, as a welcoming community that points them to a loving Savior on a level they truly understand, without watering down the authentic message of the gospel."¹⁵⁰ Smith was dedicated to building a church that was committed to and inclusive of young people. In fact, in 2010, I joined the staff at The Sanctuary in the role of Director of Royal Hood, the children's ministry at The Sanctuary, and witnessed first-hand the unparalleled priority of young people at The Sanctuary. Young people were a priority because Smith deeply believed in the potential of them, specifically the young people of North Minneapolis. Eventually The Sanctuary started a scholarship in Efrem and Donecia's name and continues to support the dreams of young heroes in its community.

¹⁵⁰ Efrem Smith, *Raising Up Young Heroes: Developing a Revolutionary Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 19.

Second, The Sanctuary, in its commitment to young people, was known in its early years not only as a ministry with a relevant, multiethnic worship experience, but specifically spotlighted monthly hip-hop services. Smith wrote about his love for hip-hop, its relevance in the church, and its evangelistic opportunity in his book co-authored with Pastor Phil Jackson called *The Hip-Hop Church: Connecting with the Movement Shaping our Culture*. In Smith and Jackson's book they argue that not only is hip-hop a staple of the current culture, but it can be a means of authentic, relevant worship as well. On a hip-hop Sunday in the early years at The Sanctuary, worshippers could expect "local Holy Hip-Hop groups, break dancing and spoken word...the youth and young adults rise from their seats and surge toward the stage with their hands up. One young man break dances, using his whole body to give God glory."¹⁵¹ The Sanctuary engaged hip-hop in worship to be relevant to young people, but also to uplift a cultural music form contextual to their urban, multiethnic ministry. The Sanctuary was and continues to be distinct in its priorities and practices.

Smith continued to lead The Sanctuary as a distinctly urban, multiethnic church through 2010. The Sanctuary became a well-known church nationwide and Smith quickly became a well-known preacher. After seven fruitful years of ministry, Smith resigned as senior pastor in 2010. Smith's resignation was a significant loss and milestone as the founding pastor moved on to a new role within our church's denomination, the Evangelical Covenant Church. The church mourned losing its first and founding pastor,

¹⁵¹ Efrem Smith and Phil Jackson, *The Hip-Hop Church: Connecting with the Movement Shaping our Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 17.

while also sought to continue to steward the vision God had given Smith in 2003.

Consequentially, The Sanctuary began a two-year search process and eventually called pastor, author, and biblical scholar Rev. Dr. Dennis R. Edwards¹⁵² in 2012.

Edwards came with expansive experience in urban, multiethnic ministry, church planting, and theological education. With a Ph.D. in New Testament studies, an intentionally pastoral heart, and extensive wisdom, he helped guide The Sanctuary deeper into its vision to be an urban, multiethnic church invested and rooted in North Minneapolis. He helped the church grow deeper in emotional health, integral toward maintaining and deepening its commitment to racial justice. He also led the church through the process of finding and buying land in North Minneapolis and building a permanent church building after renting space for 15 years in local public schools. Building a church was a monumental milestone in the life of The Sanctuary and undoubtedly strengthened Sanctuary's vision to be deeply rooted in North Minneapolis as a holistic ministry.

Edwards' legacy as a leader, however, expands far beyond the walls of The Sanctuary's present church building located on the main thoroughfare in North Minneapolis on West Broadway Avenue. Edwards' impact resides in the younger leaders he invested in, shared leadership space with, and the biblical vision of God's Kingdom on earth striving to create a more just, loving, and compassionate world. The Sanctuary was

¹⁵² Other relevant works by Dennis R. Edwards include *1 Peter*, The Story of God Commentary, ed. Tremper Longman III and Scot McKnight (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2017), *Might from the Margins* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2020), numerous articles featured in Christianity Today and Missio Alliance, and sermons.

impacted greatly by both the leadership and shepherding of both Smith and Edwards, and now its current senior pastor, Rev. Edrin C. Williams — black pastors compelled and committed to the Gospel’s mandate for racial justice. Their faithfulness and vision honor the history and legacy of the multiethnic, justice-centered movement of churches led by black evangelicals, as evidenced by the profiles above toward addressing the issue of racism in the United States.

Yet, given the particular legacy that has been narrated and the leadership that has shaped the evangelical multiethnic church movement as a response to the problem of racism in the United States, the movement is not perfect. Therefore, there is a particular problem that continues to thwart the vision of evangelical multiethnic churches and place deep strain on black pastors who lead such churches. The particular problem is the perpetuation of white supremacy, namely white dominance and power, in evangelical multiethnic churches. Even these churches with vision statements that compel the Christian toward racial justice and admonish racism from the Bible’s teachings, such evangelical multiethnic churches still experience white normativity through the expression of white hegemony. It is toward the particular predicament of white dominance that must be understood to definitively grasp the problem that permeates evangelical multiethnic churches and it is the subject in which we turn to next.

Stalling the Vision of Multiethnic Ministry: The Perpetuated Problem of White Supremacy in Multiethnic Churches and Its Impact on Black Lead Pastors

While the first aim of the chapter is meant to provide a historical narrative of the evangelical multiethnic church as a response to the sin of racism in the United States, the

second aim of the chapter is meant to excavate the deeper problem of white supremacy infused and perpetuated in evangelical multiethnic churches. In understanding the complexity of white supremacy's complicity in multiethnic churches it is important again to understand it is not the direct leadership flaw of the black senior pastor nor is it the intentional actions of white congregants. Instead it is the inevitable infusion of white normativity among committed, loving, justice-seeking, congregants and leaders traveling the journey toward awareness and justice.

Identifying the Problem of White Supremacy in the Multiethnic Church through White Normativity

These are congregants who serve selflessly toward the vision of inclusion, staff who devote their vocation toward the imperative of justice, and leaders who invest their spiritual gifts into the mission of transformation. The problem is not intent or pride, instead it is a recognition of the lifelong journey of sloughing through the deluge of white normativity that clouds white peoples' understanding, actions, and posture that then burden congregants of color and especially their beloved pastor. The problem is not motivation, but the macro social system of white power that preserves and maintains inequalities even in multiethnic churches.¹⁵³ Therefore, the next section is centered on describing the particular problem in multiethnic churches toward the end of illuminating the layers of the dilemma.

¹⁵³ Korie L. Edwards, "Role Strain Theory and Understanding the Role of Head Clergy of Racially Diverse Churches," *Sociology of Religion* 75, no. 1 (2013): 57-79.

As a part of a national study of multiethnic churches, sociologist of religion Dr. Korie Little Edwards studied multiethnic churches to understand the ways in which these churches with visions similar to The Sanctuary's, continue as diverse, integrated churches and their methodology toward dismantling racism. Through her research she also focused on one particular multiethnic church and conducted a case study supporting her national research. The ethnographic study became the book, *The Elusive Dream*. In the introduction she admits she was surprised to find that these churches did not in fact have guaranteed strategies or proven methods toward fostering and continuing ethnic diversity.¹⁵⁴ The churches were organized by diversity, yet they were not impacted in their social system and culture by diversity. In short, all of the multiethnic churches she studied still perpetuated white dominated "core culture and practices," which included "the style of preaching, music, length of services, dress codes, political and community activities, missionary interests, and theological emphases," and were more reflective of majority white churches.¹⁵⁵ She found that while congregations were diverse, whiteness was still centered in its structure and system.

Therefore, she rightly explains the perpetuation of white normativity and dominance as the core problem of white supremacy in multiethnic churches in her introductory words in *The Elusive Dream*:

Given that whiteness is the cornerstone of the racial system in the United States, it plays a fundamental role in how interracial churches function. Interracial churches will not represent a balance between whites' and racial minorities' organizational influence or religio-cultural preferences. Rather, the interrelations, religious and

¹⁵⁴ Edwards, *The Elusive Dream*, 8.

¹⁵⁵ Edwards, *The Elusive Dream*, 8.

cultural practices, and organizational structures of interracial churches will be more representative of the preferences and desires of whites than of the racial minorities in these organizations. And the racial identities, racial attitudes, and religious perspectives of people who attend interracial churches will not challenge, but may even reinforce, whiteness in these organizations. In short, I propose that interracial churches work, that is remain racially integrated, to the extent that they are *first* comfortable places for whites to attend. This is not to suggest, of course, that the congregational life of interracial churches only represents the interests and preferences of whites. Indeed, these churches need to also appeal to the racial minorities in their religious communities. Nevertheless, whiteness plays a critical role in how interracial churches are organized, ultimately producing churches that reflect a congregational life more commonly seen in white churches than in others.¹⁵⁶

Edwards diagnoses the problem within multiethnic churches with precision. Edwards' quote cited at the beginning of the chapter supports and encompasses the exact problem. While the organization may represent diversity, the structure and systems perpetuate white preferences and normative culture. The reality of white normativity is present within The Sanctuary as well.

While it has taken me time and discernment to identify the subtleties of white normativity at The Sanctuary, it does exist. In fact, it was reading Edwards' *The Elusive Dream* that provided me greater language and identification skills to name white normativity at The Sanctuary. White normativity exists throughout structures, programs, practices, and overall culture at The Sanctuary. White normativity is infused in our children's ministry through the Eurocentric theological lens white volunteers bring to their role and some teachers' inability to identify their racial bias in caring for children in their class. I have seen white dominance in white congregants' inquiries about particular cultural practices our pastoral team employs through the congregants' demand to change

¹⁵⁶ Edwards, *The Elusive Dream*, 6.

a practice before offering to have a conversation of understanding first. Our congregation is a part of a broader European-based denomination called The Evangelical Covenant Church and while it is very supportive of multiethnic churches like The Sanctuary, it has imposed its white normative cultural practices on our church. One such example included when our founding pastor resigned and our church began the search process our denomination provided us with a model and methodology of both the interim and search process that they would apply to any Covenant church, instead of a culturally-reflective mode. Other examples have come through my own leadership as a white pastor at The Sanctuary.

I could name countless examples of times my white normative lens clouded my ability to lead in a culturally-responsive way. An example was most recently when I was preparing a formation resource for our congregation in the wake of Mr. George Floyd's murder. I collaborated with three other women, all women of color, and began to sketch out a daily devotion to help congregants intersect their faith with their demands for justice and racial healing in our country. In the outline of the devotions I assigned one black female congregant to write on the topic of sharing our faith with our neighbors by talking about the injustice of the police officers' actions and how the work of justice is integral to the Christian faith. From my perspective that exercise could provide a helpful way for Sanctuary congregants share with their neighbors their view of God's justice linked to their faith. My black female congregant had a very different perspective I had not considered.

With honesty and compassion, she shared directly with me she was not comfortable writing on the topic. She did not feel comfortable in her largely all-white condo complex talking about Floyd's murder with her neighbors. We had an honest and open conversation about this and I thanked her for sharing her perspective with me because I had not considered it and we changed the topic of the daily devotion through her direction. The honesty and direct conversation she had with me was gracious on her part and illustrates one of many burdens black congregants endure in a multiethnic church. I have also, through conversation with other black congregants, realized the white normative response white staff members employ when they are given positional power as a staff member and then fail to act on programs and values integral to our church and instead perpetuate passivity. I have seen our church cater to white cultural norms in worship as to not make white congregants too uncomfortable with new cultural expressions. Therefore, at the most basic level, white staff and congregants should ask themselves, "How and to what extent does white supremacy define and shape me and my theology?"

I have seen all of these things and many more. Some are obvious and others are nuanced and elusive. None of these practices or actions are intentional, but are reflective of white normativity in the religio-cultural composition of The Sanctuary. The predicament of establishing a multiethnic church yet seeing they actually perpetuate white dominance exposes the complexity of the purpose of the multiethnic church when it exists to dismantle the such inequalities.¹⁵⁷ The perpetuation of white dominance is a

¹⁵⁷ Edwards, *The Elusive Dream*, 136.

threat to the authentic vision of the multiethnic church. And it is a burden that senior pastors of color leading these churches have to carry and navigate.

The Burden of White Normativity on Black Senior Leadership

In listing the various ways in which lead pastors of multiethnic churches especially feel the weight of the complexity of their role, Edwards states the direct challenge in her development of role strain theory, a theory she developed following a study called, *Role Strain Theory and Understanding the Role of Head Clergy of Racially Diverse Churches* when she says:

Head clergy of interracial churches are expected to address the desires and needs of congregants from at least two racial groups that have experienced distinct racialized histories and that have assumed distinctive ethnic cultures as a result. In addition, unlike their counterparts in racially homogeneous congregations, head clergy of interracial churches have the added expectation of satisfying the expectations of people who quite often have dissimilar religious backgrounds and preferences. Consequently, head clergy of racially diverse congregations will experience some degree of role strain along these fault lines.¹⁵⁸

Edwards' words and findings resonate with the reality of The Sanctuary. The Sanctuary is representationally diverse, yet situated within a social structure of whiteness and that burden has created strain on the lead pastor. Edwards calls these pastors "estranged pioneers" because "they are often valued neither by their home churches predominated by their own racial-ethnic group nor by whites in the multiethnic churches they now lead."¹⁵⁹ She comments that these pastors are "not included in white circles as peers or...not

¹⁵⁸ Korie L. Edwards, "Role Strain Theory and Understanding the Role of Head Clergy of Racially Diverse Churches," 65.

¹⁵⁹ Banks, "More Multiracial Churches Led by Black, Hispanic Pastors."

included in white circles as a leader; you're not respected as a leader.”¹⁶⁰ The experience of being an estranged pioneer as a black lead pastor of a multiethnic church is a significant observation and reality.

In a study on black senior pastors of multiethnic churches by Rev. Dr. Brian Taylor of Bethel Cincinnati Church, he found the unique challenge of black pastors of multiethnic churches was the unwillingness of white congregants to follow their leadership.¹⁶¹ What is more, Taylor's research showed that not only do black pastors of multiethnic churches have a difficult time with white congregants following their authority, but in particular he found that white men in these congregations “have no acculturation into following an African American spiritual leader.”¹⁶² Taylor's findings are incredibly important in understanding the problem of white dominance in a black-led multiethnic church like The Sanctuary and the particular strain black lead pastors carry in such churches.

Further, black leaders of evangelical multiethnic churches are perpetually presented with what biblical scholar and author William H. Myers¹⁶³ calls a

¹⁶⁰ Banks, “More Multiracial Churches Led by Black, Hispanic Pastors.”

¹⁶¹ Brian L. Taylor, “Black-Led Multiethnic Churches: Understanding the Unique Challenges and Opportunities” (DMin project thesis, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2019), 121.

¹⁶² Taylor, “Black-Led Multiethnic Churches: Understanding the Unique Challenges and Opportunities,” 122.

¹⁶³ Other relevant works by William H. Myers include *God's Yes was Louder than My No* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015) and *The Irresistible Urge to Preach* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015).

“methodological dilemma”¹⁶⁴ This dilemma is centered on the complexity a black senior pastor of a multiethnic church must navigate in implementing the church’s vision. They must navigate how to lead a culturally diverse congregation with differing expectations and views of ministry models, invigorate congregants to practice justice in culturally relevant and sensitive ways in their context, constantly identify and interrogate white normativity within the church, structure, staff, and congregants, and even probe the ways in which white hegemony has shaped them as they understand the impact of white supremacy in their own ideology and theology.¹⁶⁵ Such complexity presents quite a dilemma to discern, process, and lead with integrity, equity, intersectionality, and cultural humility and awareness. In short, just because The Sanctuary espouses it is black-led and black-centered does not mean it will produce such an outcome, nor does it mean simply employing a black pastor will remedy the ills of white normativity in its structure and organization. Thus, deconstructing white hegemony within a multiethnic church is the work of all members and all leaders and it provides a constant challenge to the senior leadership of such a congregation. The challenge includes continually seeking cultural awareness and identifying bias, identifying where white normativity is infused in the structure of the church, and even yield one’s own perspectives to that of a diverse range

¹⁶⁴ William H. Myers, “The Hermeneutical Dilemma of the African American Biblical Student,” in *Stony the Road We Trod*, ed. Cain Hope Felder (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 44.

¹⁶⁵ It is important leaders of color prioritize space for reflection on how white dominant culture has influenced their theological and spiritual formation. Therefore, senior leaders of color might consider seeking support spaces with other pastors of color to process their experiences, perspectives, training, and lens as it relates to white normativity toward healthy leadership of multicultural churches.

of voices. Therefore, when The Sanctuary asserts it is a black-led church, it must be led by a healthy, self-reflective, mature pastor with the proper support and care to manage such complex dynamics.

Conclusion

The problem persists. Even though the evangelical multiethnic church movement began as a response to white supremacy and racial injustice, its methodology, practices, and structure have not dismantled the problem, but it has in fact nuanced white normativity in its organization. The particular problem lies in the social structure and system of white supremacy and power, perpetuated for the comfort of white congregants. The problem is centered on Perkins' words when he said, "The evangelical church, with a few remarkable exceptions, remains the greatest stronghold of the sin of racism in America today. What a tragic betrayal of the gospel of reconciliation."¹⁶⁶ While Perkins was referring to evangelicalism's historical perpetuation of racism, his words no doubt challenge even current evangelical multiethnic churches planted to dismantle racism. The problem persists that even these multiethnic churches deceive their very own commitment to racial justice.

As stated in the opening of the chapter, there is something unique about The Sanctuary as an evangelical, urban, multiethnic church situated in Minnesota in the US. It is difficult to find evangelical multiethnic churches in the Twin Cities and of those that exist, most are led by a white pastor. The Sanctuary is a unique congregation with a

¹⁶⁶ Perkins, *With Justice for All*, 32.

particular story and peculiar vision. However, The Sanctuary was not the first nor the only of its kind.

Instead, as evidenced by the first portion of the chapter, The Sanctuary is situated within a historical trajectory of multiethnic congregations seeking to address, through their theological and ministerial pursuits of racial justice, the sin of white supremacy. In that trajectory, the establishing legacy of Thurman allowed for such a movement to exist and flourish. His inaugural multiethnic church back in 1944 paved the way for King's pursuit of integration in US society, which later, through King's example and religious convictions of racial justice, later propelled black evangelical leaders to pursue their own form of racial justice founded upon their theological understanding of racial reconciliation. From the three profiles of Perkins, Skinner, and McNeil, the reader can see clearly their particular contributions to the movement and the particular placement in which to situated and understand The Sanctuary. The first section of the chapter reveals that the evangelical multiethnic ecumenical movement was part of a larger historical narrative and was from its inception, black-led and black-centered, positioned for the purpose of addressing racial injustice in the American church and society. The chapter narrated the historical source and development of the multiethnic ecumenical movement, particularly its emergence within evangelicalism.

The second portion of the chapter acknowledged that while the evangelical multiethnic church movement began as a response to the problem of white supremacy, these same churches actually perpetuate the very problems they were founded to address, which stalls their vision. The Sanctuary is not immune to such problems. The second

portion detailed Edwards' sociological findings of multiethnic churches' perpetuation of white normativity and dominance through their culture, structures, theology, and practices. Edwards found that the reason these churches allowed such a perpetuation and expression of white hegemony to occur was the perpetual socialization of white supremacy that seeks to comfort and prioritize white people and white dominant practices and ideologies. The above anecdotes illuminate the particular presentation of white normativity at The Sanctuary, among many others. White dominance within The Sanctuary and other evangelical multiethnic churches also stalls momentum toward their vision of racial justice and multicultural representation, and it also places a significant stress on lead pastors.

In naming the problem and giving greater texture to its complexity, it is now important to ask, "What next?" It is clear the problem is power infused by white supremacy and the partiality of maintaining white comfort. It is also clear that these problems hinder and are also antithetical toward the very vision and purpose of multiethnic churches. Therefore, what is the ideal and why is that ideal best? Toward these questions we turn to the vision of black-centered leadership and experience situated in the contextual location of The Sanctuary in North Minneapolis.

PART 2: THE VISION

CHAPTER 3

THE PRECISE VISION: THE NECESSITY OF BLACK-CENTERED LEADERSHIP AND EXPERIENCE

“For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.”

–Audre Lorde, *The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House*¹⁶⁷

When a structure is built, it is constructed by the ideas, systems, and values of the central builder. Whether it be an actual physical structure, a societal system, or a dominant culture, author, womanist, and civil rights activist Audre Lorde’s¹⁶⁸ words are poignant regarding the inner workings that create a structure. In particular, those that conceptualize, build, and maintain a social structure not only center their personal values and biases, but also perpetuate them. Given white supremacy’s structure in the United States that was built by and maintained by white people, and also chapter one’s description of white peoples’ polarizing experiences of awareness about race and racism in comparison to black people, it is clear therefore that Black people know more about power, practice, and the harm of whiteness than white people. White people often have a

¹⁶⁷ Audre Lorde, *The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House* (London: Penguin Classics, 2018).

¹⁶⁸ Audre Lorde’s titles are vast. Particular relevant works by Audre Lorde include *Sister Outsider* (London: Crossing Press, 2007), *Your Silence Will Not Protect You* (Madrid: Silver Press, 2017), *Coal* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996) and *The Cancer Journals* (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 2006), among others.

hard time grasping the nuances of white supremacy and describing its features. So, who, therefore, should lead in dismantling the structure and applying new tools to the work, as Lorde's analogy suggests? These rhetorical questions and Lorde's quote make clear that in the work toward dismantling the structure of white superiority and racism, white people cannot be the ones who direct, inform, and lead that process because they are too engrained in the structure itself and benefit from it. They can certainly be a part of the movement, but are not the best leaders, when considering Lorde's quote, of such a dismantling. Moreover, white and black leadership certainly cannot dismantle white supremacy with the same means the structure was built in the first place. Instead, different values, voices, and leadership must interrogate the framework and norms that support white supremacy before a new, more just structure can be erected. As chapter one and two discovered, white supremacy is the normative and dominant structure that informs and infiltrates all of society, including evangelical multiethnic churches, in the United States. Therefore, if the purpose of evangelical multiethnic churches is to dismantle such unjust systems, then Lorde's words must act as a guiding rule. To dismantle white supremacy in the American multiethnic church is to envision and prioritize a new structure. Such a process of envisioning and leading a more just structure should be led by those that experience oppression from the structure of white supremacy. The purpose of the chapter is to envision the ideal outcome specifically at The Sanctuary, an urban, multiethnic church, seeking to follow the gospel of Jesus Christ that prioritizes the marginalized and humbles the powerful by centering black leadership and new institutional structural models.

In particular, the chapter has three aims. First, the chapter provides a contextual analysis of North Minneapolis, the community in which The Sanctuary is located and serves. Second, the chapter names the desired outcome of The Sanctuary to be an authentically urban, multiethnic church that centers in particular the leadership and experience of black people given the broader context of North Minneapolis. Finally, the chapter provides a biblical framework for the reorientation of power from the example of 1 Peter. In short, the chapter asserts that The Sanctuary cannot fully be a multiethnic church if it ascribes to white normative structures and white-dominated means of leadership. The Sanctuary must invert power structures to imagine a more authentic structure toward its vision of being a multiethnic, black-led church rooted in North Minneapolis. The Sanctuary uplifts black leadership as the most authentic structure of leadership given its context in North Minneapolis and its pursuit of dismantling white supremacy as a multiethnic church.

North Minneapolis: A Contextual Analysis for Centering the Black Experience

“No justice, no peace! Prosecute the police!” This rally cry, repeated over and over again as the crowd around me swelled outside the fourth precinct of the Minneapolis Police Department on Plymouth Avenue in North Minneapolis. The crowd and our chant included both a righteous anger and a safe, tangible sensation of *esprit de corps* — we were searching for community justice. As we gathered it was a very cold, typical late-November evening as the sun was setting in North Minneapolis. There were fire pits scattered about the street on Plymouth Avenue, a main thoroughfare of the community. Some people were sharing and eating Little Caesar’s \$5 pizza bought and delivered by

community members. Others held signs with poignant demands for justice, while still others began lighting candles and introducing themselves to other neighbors. I gathered around with other clergy members. My feet were sore, hands bitter cold, and my belly swelling and aching in the third trimester of pregnancy. Fellow clergy members and I joked about how we needed a class on Urban Protest 101 in seminary. Beyond our collegial joking, we knew we were involved in a historic demonstration of justice for our churches, neighborhood, and country. Eight days prior on November 15, 2015, Mr. Jamar Clark was shot and killed by two police officers, execution-style, just one-block from The Sanctuary's location at the time where we were gathered to mourn and protest his murder. But while it was an unforgettable moment of violence in our community, it was hardly unexpected.

Fifty years earlier at the exact spot of the protests for Clark, a black pride, neighborhood-led organization called The Way was founded. It was described as “a community center devoted to the needs of young black people” on Plymouth Avenue, at the time referred to simply as The Avenue.¹⁶⁹ In the mid-sixties there were multiple demonstrations by black community members in North Minneapolis for the purpose of addressing racism, systemic oppression, and basic inequalities. While whites, and mainstream white media at the time, called them riots, founding members of The Way were deliberate to call them “rebellions” to frame the intentionality of their motives.¹⁷⁰ It

¹⁶⁹ Randy Furst, “Founders and Supporters Celebrate The Way’s 50th Anniversary,” *Star Tribune*, August 5, 2016, accessed January 28, 2018, <http://www.startribune.com/a-symbol-of-minneapolis-black-power-the-way-celebrates-the-50th-anniversary-of-its-founding/389326391/>.

is not coincidental that twenty-two years later The Way was no longer in operation and the Minneapolis Police Department occupied the land to build the fourth precinct in North Minneapolis. That not only symbolized the racial tension that existed in the area, but also the “erasure” of the organization and the community’s deepest felt needs and cries for justice.¹⁷¹ Our community deeply grieved Clark’s murder and the particular location of the shooting provoked memories of racial trauma on the part of a white police officer of a black resident in North Minneapolis, and in particular, on Plymouth Avenue.

Now on that very spot on Plymouth Avenue, almost five years after Clark’s execution and now, after the murder of Mr. George Floyd on May 25, 2020, the statement, “Black Lives Matter” is painted on Plymouth Avenue. Each letter was designed and painted by a different local artist to speak loudly about the worth of black residents, despite the United States’ treatment of them, and served as a profound historical statement on Plymouth Avenue in North Minneapolis.

¹⁷⁰ Furst, “Founders and Supporters Celebrate The Way’s 50th Anniversary.”

¹⁷¹ *Cornerstones: A History of North Minneapolis*, co-produced with the University of Minnesota and Urban Research and Outreach Engagement Center (TPT Twin Cities PBS, November 13, 2011), <https://www.tpt.org/cornerstones-a-history-of-north-minneapolis/>.



(Photo of the Black Lives Matter mural painted on Plymouth Avenue in North Minneapolis just down the block from the fourth precinct of the Minneapolis Police Department on July 18, 2020. Photo taken by Aaron Lavinsky for the *Star Tribune*)

In fact, in the days after Floyd was murdered in Minneapolis and an uprising began, The Sanctuary intentionally hosted BBQ dinners every night to be present with our community. It was a tangible way we often come together as a community after eruptions of violence or moments of community pain. Our current senior pastor, Rev. Edrin C. Williams, calls it a way for us to draw closer to our neighbors in times of crisis, instead of moving away in fear or complacency. We also saw it as an act of goodwill when businesses and buildings were targeted for looting and fires. Our church leadership prayed every night, often not sleeping ourselves, wondering if our brand-new building would be broken into or burned down. But instead of boarding up the whole church like other businesses did, we intentionally did not to show the community we were with them and not afraid, we were resilient like them, and here for the long haul. In the window of every large glass window were big signs that read, “Black-led church.” The purpose was to let the community know it was a Black-led establishment for and with the community and not an outside, predominantly white organization seeking to gentrify and profit off of the community. That statement alone proves the need for black-centered leadership and

experience at The Sanctuary. It was a clear message to the community that The Sanctuary was led and influenced by a black pastor. Those signs signaled to the community The Sanctuary was aware of the contextual, historical, and social realities of North Minneapolis.

While North Minneapolis has experienced many disparities as effects of white supremacy, North Minneapolis has long been a region of Minneapolis where oppressed people groups found safety and community. Beginning first with Eastern Europeans, then Jews fleeing Russia, later African Americans in the mid-forties and following, and Southeast Asians post-Vietnam and beyond.¹⁷² It has been a place of diversity and early integration post-World War II.¹⁷³ It is a community that is resilient in the face of ongoing racism and it is comprised of close-knit neighbors who care deeply for one another.

But as the above examples portray, there have also been historic moments of racial division and pain. A purposeful and definitive divider, Interstate 94, was erected in the 1960s right through North Minneapolis, dividing it from the rest of the city.¹⁷⁴ North Minneapolis increasingly grew in its inequalities and isolation from the rest of the city. As a result of intentional, systemic racism and under-resourced development, North Minneapolis continues to experience higher rates of violence, greater reports of adverse

¹⁷² *Cornerstones: A History of North Minneapolis*, co-produced with the University of Minnesota and Urban Research and Outreach Engagement Center.

¹⁷³ *Cornerstones: A History of North Minneapolis*, co-produced with the University of Minnesota and Urban Research and Outreach Engagement Center.

¹⁷⁴ Minnesota Department of Transportation, “Rethinking I-94,” last modified 2020, accessed April 12, 2020, <https://www.dot.state.mn.us/I-94minneapolis-stpaul/background.html>.

childhood experiences (ACEs), under-performing schools, and a stunted developing infrastructure.¹⁷⁵ At the time of the demonstrations following the police shooting of Clark in 2015, many activists named the racial tension and divisive inequalities warning “north Minneapolis is ready to burn” likening the tension to Ferguson, MO after Mr. Michael Brown was shot and killed by police in 2014.¹⁷⁶ The Sanctuary resides in location of complexity. On one hand the residents in North Minneapolis experience the tension of racism and inequality in the community. On the other hand, the residents in North Minneapolis experience a wide diversity in the neighborhood and many residents uphold a strong value for advocating for the oppressed. North Minneapolis is the community in which The Sanctuary is planted and rooted. Moreover, North Minneapolis is the community The Sanctuary seeks to center as its installation of black leadership and reimagining congregational life as black-centered and formed.

The Sanctuary: A Strategic Centering of Black Leadership and Experience

It may seem unusual for a multiethnic church to center one ethnic experience over another. It might seem counter-intuitive or binary in its approach. But given the context of North Minneapolis and the specific demographics of the church, the vision to grow as a multiethnic church, while centering the black experience, is intentional. North Minneapolis is the historical epicenter of the Black community in Minneapolis and its planting in North Minneapolis was intentional on the part of founding pastor, Smith.

¹⁷⁵ Coifman, “North Minneapolis: Echoes of the Unrest in 1967.”

¹⁷⁶ Coifman, “North Minneapolis: Echoes of the Unrest in 1967.”

When Smith planted The Sanctuary he stated, “There is a need for an urban, multi-ethnic, and holistic Christian community.”¹⁷⁷ He believed The Sanctuary would be in particular a “sneak preview of heaven” through its diversity, because it would be a church that addresses the systemic injustices of North Minneapolis, and truly meet the felt needs of the community.¹⁷⁸ The Sanctuary would be committed to being a multiethnic church as well as “committed to multi-ethnic leadership, [and] a multi-ethnic worship experience.”¹⁷⁹ Even in his vision of The Sanctuary as a diverse church seeking to be “an anti-racist community,” The Sanctuary would prioritize the “empowerment of African-Americans...[and] there will be no apologies for this.”¹⁸⁰ The Sanctuary would embrace a multiethnic identity and though it is still largely black and white in composition with black leadership at the helm, as expressed in chapter two, white normativity and dominance still exists as its modus operandi. The Sanctuary was birthed as a multiethnic church, while centering the leadership and experience of African Americans. Such an emphasis was in part due to its context in North Minneapolis, and the demographics of

¹⁷⁷ Smith, “The Sanctuary Covenant Church: An Urban, Christ-centered, Holistic, and Multi-ethnic Church,” 1.

¹⁷⁸ Smith, “The Sanctuary Covenant Church: An Urban, Christ-centered, Holistic, and Multi-ethnic Church,” 1-2.

¹⁷⁹ Smith, “The Sanctuary Covenant Church: An Urban, Christ-centered, Holistic, and Multi-ethnic Church,” 2.

¹⁸⁰ Smith, “The Sanctuary Covenant Church: An Urban, Christ-centered, Holistic, and Multi-ethnic Church,” 6, 8.

the church. While The Sanctuary is multiethnic in comparison to most churches in the state of Minnesota, its challenge is that it is still primarily black and white.

In a 2018 church-wide survey of the demographics at The Sanctuary, it showed it was 53% white, 39% black, 4% Asian, 2% Latino, and 2% did not disclose out of a congregation of about 650.¹⁸¹ The Sanctuary is therefore a multiethnic church from Emerson's definition as "having *less than 80 percent of any single racial group.*"¹⁸² But it is also largely biracial in its current configuration. So, while The Sanctuary is predominantly white and black, it seeks to elevate all ethnicities toward its vision of being a multiethnic church centered on justice. The purpose for the church uplifting the black experience therefore, is contextual given its home in North Minneapolis and the local populations and histories the church seeks to serve and partner with. It is important at this point to consider again from chapter two the particular role and weight of the lead pastor at such a church.

While The Sanctuary is black-led and black-centered, that centering leadership holds a responsibility to identify and interrogate white normativity not only in the organization itself but also in the leader's ideology and theology. Simply being a person

¹⁸¹ "The Sanctuary Covenant Church Demographic Survey," The Sanctuary Covenant Church, 2018, <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiYmE4NjA5ODYtZDAxOC00NmM3LTkxNjAtYWEzYTUxNzA3NzQ2IiwidCI6IjFIM2U3MWJLWZjY2EtNDI4NC05MDMxLTY4OGNjOGYzN2I2YiIsImMiOiR9>.

¹⁸² Yale Divinity School, "A New Day for Multiracial Congregations," *Reflections: Yale Divinity School*, 2013, <https://reflections.yale.edu/article/future-race/new-day-multiracial-congregations>. Author's emphasis.

of color does not imply a demarcation from the infiltration of white normativity in leadership practice or theological interpretation. Instead, white supremacy is such a powerful construct and ideology in the United States that it shapes all people in particular ways. In *The Burden of Black Religion* by scholar, author, and historian of Christianity Curtis J. Evans,¹⁸³ he considers the debate regarding whether or not the “black church” promote[s] social and political reform and thus stand[s] against institutional racism, or has it encouraged a passive resignation to the status quo?”¹⁸⁴ Such a particular question is an interesting one regarding how white dominance perpetuates the status quo even in the racially-specific tradition of the black church. That particular question is not the scope of this project, but it illuminates a conundrum black liberation theologian James Cone¹⁸⁵ also dealt with in understanding his religion and his experience of oppression as a black man, and thus his life’s work toward a theology of liberation. Evans describes Cone’s conundrum of white dominance infused in Christianity:

Black theologian James Cone astutely noted this dilemma [or Christianity being a white man’s religion and tool of oppression over black Christians] when he argued in 1976 that African American college students equated Christianity with the “white man’s religion” and often identified such religion as the opiate of the

¹⁸³ Other relevant works by Curtis J. Evans include *A Theology of Brotherhood* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming) and many scholarly journal articles found in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, *Journal of Southern Religion*, and *Religion and American Culture*.

¹⁸⁴ Curtis J. Evans, *The Burden of Black Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 11.

¹⁸⁵ Other relevant titles by James Cone include *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (New York: Orbis, 2013), *A Black Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis, 2010), *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Orbis, 2019), *God of the Oppressed* (New York, Orbis, 1997), and many more.

people. For Cone, however the issue could not be so easily resolved by a rejection of Christianity because this was the religion that he saw his father practice when he rejected the system of Jim Crow during the 1950s. Yet it was precisely because his father was defiant, referring to whites as ‘sons of bitches,’ that Cone could hold on to *that kind* of Christianity. So Cone, the radical and outspoken black theologian of the 1970s, urged blacks not to abandon Christianity so hastily.¹⁸⁶

Curtis demonstrates through Cone’s experience that Eurocentric oppressive theologies and strategies are so prevalent and normative that they can impact leaders, denominations, and racially-particular traditions as well. Cone’s experience is important to The Sanctuary because it serves as reminder that no one is immune to the prominent and residual effects of white supremacy and it is the ongoing work to name and uncover such normativity that stalls the vision of justice and equity.

Another integral examination of Eurocentric ideologies infiltrating black religious-cultural ideology includes William H. Myers’ exploration of black seminary students navigating Eurocentric biblical and theological training in “The Hermeneutical Dilemma of the African American Biblical Student” in *Stony the Road We Trod*. In this chapter Myers exposes a subtle yet dominant Eurocentric ideology infiltrated in biblical interpretation literature and its proceeding implications on the academic and ministerial training of black seminary students.¹⁸⁷ Myers not only names the negotiations these black seminary students need to navigate in largely white institutions, but also the challenges such a narrow ideology yields. Myers argues the narrow ideology of Eurocentrism

¹⁸⁶ Evans, *The Burden of Black Religion*, 278.

¹⁸⁷ Myers, “The Hermeneutical Dilemma of the African American Biblical Student,” 40-41.

includes an exclusive character that omits other viewpoints, it is concerned with the belief that there is only one meaning of the biblical text and Eurocentrism situates itself as orthodoxy, it fails often to interpret the socio-political implications the Bible has for today, and often is written for the dominant culture and is not accessible to the everyday Christian nor certainly the marginalized Christian's experience.¹⁸⁸ These arguments are important to The Sanctuary's value to be black-led and black-centered because it elucidates how such centering is particularized in a multiethnic church. Given Myers' argument, The Sanctuary's lead pastor must interrogate his or her Eurocentric pedagogical and socio-cultural methodologies and ideologies and interrogate those with a more robust articulation of a black-centered theology toward liberation and an inclusion of other minority cultures and Christian ideologies.

Evan's exploration of the black church's historical role in upending social injustices coupled with William H. Myers' Evans' assessment of African American seminary students' parsing through Eurocentric biblical and theological training is important for The Sanctuary as a black-led and black-centered multiethnic church. It is important because no one is immune to the prominent and residual effects of white supremacy, and it is the ongoing work to name and uncover such normativity that stalls the vision of justice and equity. Black leadership does not equate a buffer for white normativity. Therefore healthy, mature black leadership is the remedy toward authentic racial justice.

¹⁸⁸ Myers, "The Hermeneutical Dilemma of the African American Biblical Student," 46-47.

Therefore, the reason for centering healthy black leadership in the context of North Minneapolis at The Sanctuary was because such an emphasis has the potential to be more successful in dismantling white supremacy and white normative structures within the church that uplifts all marginalized ethnicities in the church, neighborhood, city, and beyond. By centering healthy black leadership, The Sanctuary will be able to truly become more multiethnic because the congregation will be more apt to dismantle white supremacy and thus truly celebrate all ethnicities.

A particular example of centering black leadership toward greater multiethnicity emerged in the days and weeks following Floyd's death at the hands of Minneapolis police officers. After the video of Floyd's murder was released via social media and news outlets across the state, nation, and world, many white pastors began contacting our senior pastor and me, asking what they should say to the congregation, how they should respond, what actions to take, and how to deliver and do it all in a way that would not agitate their congregants that might disagree with such viewpoints. The flood of emails, phone calls, and texts proved two important truths about many white evangelical pastors. First, white Christian evangelicals are largely ill-equipped to speak about the prevalence of white supremacy and race relations in the United States and how that informs their Christian vocation and practice, and as a result, fall into a form of paralyzed fragility — unable to discern what to do even though they have amplified power in society.¹⁸⁹ An example of a white person's failure to discern how to address racism in broader white

¹⁸⁹ Hart, *Trouble I've Seen*, 114.

evangelicalism were the comments made by megachurch pastor, Louie Giglio. Days after Floyd was murdered Giglio attempted to address racism with his church and then stated the term white privilege could be replaced with “white blessing.” He then proceeded to call slavery a blessing as well.¹⁹⁰ Giglio’s words exemplify how white people are often ill-equipped to lead in anti-racism work. It also exposes in particular how white pastors are particularly unacquainted with leading their church in work of racial justice, even though many are given such prestigious platforms to preach the Gospel. Second, despite their inability, they are still elevated to such positions of leadership in churches, denominational conferences, and national denominational positions. This is not to say they should not hold these positions of leadership or all ethnic minorities should hold such positions, but it does show the lack of integration of Christian faith centered on justice in vocational ministry practice. The above is an example that when congregations and denominations center the healthy leadership of ethnic minorities toward Gospel-centered justice, such churches and denominations may be more successful toward that end.

The vision to be a black-led multiethnic church is not only contextual, but also strategic. In his book entitled *The Racial Contract*, philosopher Charles Mills¹⁹¹ asserts

¹⁹⁰ Sarah Pulliam Bailey, “Atlanta megachurch pastor Louie Giglio sets off firestorm by calling slavery a ‘blessing’ to whites,” *The Washington Post*, June 16, 2020, accessed August 19, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2020/06/16/atlanta-megachurch-pastor-louie-giglio-sets-off-firestorm-after-calling-slavery-white-blessing/>.

¹⁹¹ Other relevant works by Charles Mills include *From Class to Race* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), *Black Rights/Whites Wrongs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), *Blackness Visible* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), and *Contract and Domination* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007).

that not only did white supremacy shape the formation of the United States and result in racism in the country, Mills also exposes the reality that there is a social contract at play in the world based on white supremacy.¹⁹² The social contract of white supremacy in the United States has created a racial contract by which perpetual domination is allowed and even expected. It has become so pervasive and permitted, “it is the background against which other systems...are highlighted.”¹⁹³ Mills’ racial contract theory is deeply applicable at The Sanctuary because of the acknowledgement that the social contract of whiteness is allowed and expected and thus carries into the life, leadership, and structure of The Sanctuary in subtle forms.

The American social contract includes the generally agreed upon norms, values, perceived history, and overall guiding rules of the U.S. society. The racial contract, in Mills’ view, however, often entails invisible rules that apply to black people but not white people. The racial contract defines actions for marginalized people of color, but white people are above such a contract. An example of the social contract in the United States is the assertion that a person is considered innocent until proven guilty. The racial contract at play in the United States, however, asserts that white people are considered innocent until proven guilty, but black people are readily seen as guilty, dangerous, and exceedingly violent and unlawful.¹⁹⁴ Like Lorde’s quote at the beginning of the chapter,

¹⁹² Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 1.

¹⁹³ Mills, *The Racial Contract*, 2.

¹⁹⁴ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010).

the racial contract of white supremacy is the structure, the house upon which the United States is built, and white people are the master builders of it. In considering Lorde's words and Mills' observations, how might the racial contract of white supremacy be dismantled, specifically in a church like The Sanctuary? What are the subtle nuances of white normativity at The Sanctuary?

In *The Racial Contract*, Mills gives a systematic framework for dismantling America's racial contract. He uses "standpoint theory" to justify his claim that "In understanding the workings of a system of oppression, a perspective from the bottom up is more likely to be accurate than one from the top down."¹⁹⁵ Mills is stating that in order to dismantle the racial contract of white supremacy, and, in turn, for The Sanctuary to live into its vision as a church centered on racial justice, the perspective of the oppressed will be more accurate, objective, or exact toward dismantling racial injustice, than the perspective of a white person entrenched and benefitting from the system of white supremacy.¹⁹⁶ Mills' particular use of standpoint theory in presenting a more objective perspective is called "epistemic advantage."¹⁹⁷ Epistemic advantage describes how marginalized people have a keener perspective of unjust structures, and therefore have a clearer understanding of how to disrupt that structure. Conversely, white people are so fixed within white supremacy, their leadership toward dismantling racial injustice is certainly possible, but not without extraordinary effort, time, and dependence on people

¹⁹⁵ Mills, *The Racial Contract*, 109.

¹⁹⁶ Hart, *Trouble I've Seen*, 129, 151.

¹⁹⁷ Mills, *The Racial Contract*, 109.

of color to guide them through the work of dismantling. The example of white pastors seeking guidance in how to lead in the aftermath of Floyd's murder was also true in the particular context of white congregants at The Sanctuary and both situations illustrate subtle forms of white normativity. While a majority of white congregants spoke openly about how his death was unjust and sinful, protested police brutality, and shouted, "Black Lives Matter," there were still many unable to discern what action to take next. While quick to decry rioting, they did not understand its reasoning. Some well-intentioned congregants gave uninformed advice to our pastoral team on relief efforts, while others recommended how leadership should talk about the moment without offering to help or speak about it themselves. These examples are particularities of how white dominance exists within The Sanctuary.

In particular, when some white congregants began emphasizing the injustice of rioting due to the harm and destruction it caused, it began shifting the focus from the injustice of Floyd's murder, to the loss of commercial businesses and buildings. While that sort of destruction is certainly not what anyone would want for their neighborhood, city, or state, it began shifting the focus of the purpose of the protests and uncovered the depth of commitment and understanding of the movement. It revealed still a deep value of businesses and buildings over the black community. It is also evidence of white people seeking to preserve the status quo versus the messy, inconvenient, and hard work of deconstructing such a structure. Instead of seeing it through King's words that "a riot is the language of the unheard" and how white supremacy is to blame instead of rightfully angry protestors, the loss of property became the overt focus for some white congregants

at The Sanctuary, which therein lies another facet of white normative ideology from a dominant epistemology.

Thus, it is important to note the complexity of the Lake Street riots in particular, as some were instigated by white supremacists from the suburbs and other states, particularly “Umbrella Man,” which deserved condemnation.¹⁹⁸ Yet white Christians stating, “Black Lives Matter,” must also listen to the self-reflective and pressing questions of Walker-Barnes. During the riots, Walker-Barnes saw many white Christians simultaneously stating, “Black Lives Matter” while denouncing such expressions of exasperation toward perpetuated racist subjugation or assumptions that place black protestors as the instigators of such actions. Walker-Barnes provides a particular word to white Christians when she wrote:

How long can people be expected to sit in respectable silence while the state keeps killing [Black people] with impunity? Where else do we expect the rage to go? Turning the narrative into a focus on property damage is a way of further demonizing Black people (because it’s assumed that’s who the protestors are, even though some of these groups have been remarkably diverse)... [This] distracts us from the focus of protests.¹⁹⁹

Walker-Barnes names a subtlety of white privilege when she demonstrates that the overemphasis of looting and rioting by white congregants at The Sanctuary exposed how the particularities of the status quo resides in white people at The Sanctuary, given their

¹⁹⁸ Karma Allen, “Man who helped ignite George Floyd riots identified as white supremacist: Police.” *ABC News*, July 29, 2020, accessed August 17, 2020, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/man-helped-ignite-george-floyd-riots-identified-white/story?id=72051536>.

¹⁹⁹ Dr. Chaniqua Walker-Barnes, Facebook post, May 30, 2020, accessed August 19, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/cwalkerbarnes>.

position within white supremacy. I count myself as one of them in holding similar thoughts, wonderings, actions, and fears that deterred and even deflected the work of justice in that moment. While many white Christians at The Sanctuary would ascribe to standing in solidarity with their Black brothers and sisters in the work toward justice, the reality is to do so assumes a personal cost many are not willing to make. Because instead of looking to one's own personal comfort, white people in the work of racial justice must heed the words of Angela Davis when she said, "creating solidarity [means] representing ourselves not primarily as individuals, but as members of the communities of struggle."²⁰⁰ Seeing beyond individuality is very difficult for white people to do, myself included, even though we deeply want change to happen.

The myriad reactions of some white congregants at The Sanctuary is what Rev. Dr. Dennis Edwards calls "toxic Christianity" in his book, *Might from the Margins*, when he states this deadly version of Christianity "fuels actions motivated by fear, to incite behaviors that marginalize others, and...harden hearts to the cries of the oppressed."²⁰¹ His statement of toxic Christianity exposes the reality that white Christians often place their comfort above the livelihood and flourishing of others, particularly those marginalized. Thus, white Christians' fears situated in white supremacy, then perpetuate

²⁰⁰ Tonya Mosely, "'An Extraordinary Moment': Angela Davis Says Protests Recognize Long Overdue Anti-Racist Work," *WBUR*, June 19, 2020, accessed August 18, 2020, https://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2020/06/19/angela-davis-protests-anti-racism?fbclid=IwAR3yP5-tyQzoi-lbeDOMID1XsbDqAeggCmQok7oYhtLbnDMBmgdef_1B8fY.

²⁰¹ Dennis R. Edwards, *Might from the Margins: The Gospel's Power to Turn the Tables on Injustice* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2020), 66.

injustice instead of addressing it and get in the way of furthering justice. Toxic Christianity was on display in the aftermath of Floyd's death and it accentuates the inability of white people to lead, discern, and activate true justice on the behalf of the oppressed.

Another phenomenon that began to happen after the riots and clean-up efforts began was throngs of white Christians from the suburbs and rural areas gave an exorbitant amount of donations for Sanctuary's Northside neighbors while grocery stores and businesses were damaged and closed. In particular, an all-white, large, well-known suburban Twin Cities church began publishing on their social media outlets that Sanctuary was collecting various food items and goods for relief efforts for North Minneapolis neighbors. Then overnight, The Sanctuary began accepting hundreds of donations from across the state, thousands of dollars in financial donations, and nationwide media attention for our efforts. The Sanctuary became an expansive, full-fledged distribution center overnight.

The uncomfortable reality of the outpouring of donations, however, was that it was not our idea or ask. We did not tell that suburban church we were accepting donations and we had no intention of becoming a distribution center. But because of their assumptive charity, wanting to do something but also assuming what was needed, their charity began something we did not intend. While the above examples have been subtle and more elusive forms of white dominance and normativity, this was an acute display of it. Their assumptive charity resulted in both incredible and hard realities as The Sanctuary quite literally began the Northside grocery store overnight. From the start of June through

August, The Sanctuary served 400-500 Northside families every single week for the entire summer of 2020. It also included serving over 1,500 household members that live in our neighborhood each Friday. We hosted over 3,300 volunteers from all over Minnesota, and we made necessary partnerships with organizations securing grants that has allowed us to provide fresh food and meat to our community. We provided 10,500 bags of food, including 42,000 rolls of toilet paper (no small feat in the year 2020 with toilet paper hoarding and in-stock shortages), and \$168,000 was donated to our care fund and we used virtually all of it to provide supplies for our neighbors during the time of crisis. The above is something to celebrate and we are grateful for God's provision and the ways we were able to care for our neighbors with compassion.

Yet the difficult reality was that it has led to near burnout for our pastors and staff team to organize and oversee all summer. In particular it caused initial deep frustrations and pressure for our senior pastor to manage this white suburban church assuming a need. Then due to COVID-19, it meant many of our congregants who would normally be excited at the chance to serve were not able to serve and therefore put a strain on volunteers we had a formed relationship with and who knew our neighbors. It has also been the place where well-intentioned white people from outside of our church have come to volunteer, yet in the process made harmful assumptions, exposed their racial bias, and even some volunteers harmed our neighbors, thus our reputation with our community was hampered through their ignorance. These are clear examples of varying forms of white dominance and misguided white people seeking to do good, but

perpetuating harm instead — ostensibly working toward justice, yet perpetuating injustice.

From Floyd’s death, the subsequent riots, managing and leading a weekly distribution for our community, and white congregants’ reactions to all of it, it is important to state again that even when well-intentioned, white people often are not the best leaders in the work toward racial justice because their version of justice is almost always infiltrated by white normativity. After all, Mills states unequivocally, “When white people say, ‘Justice,’ they mean ‘Just us.’”²⁰² White supremacy as a structure is relatively invisible to white people and thus their version of justice is still clouded by their lens of whiteness, as evidenced by the examples above. In Lorde’s quote, therefore, it is marginalized people who understand both the structure and the tools that built the master’s house and therefore are more apt at dismantling it with the necessary tools. In North Minneapolis at The Sanctuary, therefore, it is the black voice, leadership, experience, and spirituality that is most adept at dismantling white supremacy.

1 Peter: Reorienting Power Toward Racial Justice

Thus far I have showed that black-centered leadership and experience at The Sanctuary is contextual given its roots in North Minneapolis and it is systematic in approach due to its vision of most authentically and successfully dismantling white supremacy. Now I seek to show how the configuration of black-centered power is biblically grounded as a reorientation of power toward racial justice at The Sanctuary. To do so, one must look at 1 Peter. In particular, look at the context of the original

²⁰² Mills, *The Racial Contract*, 110.

community and social landscape of 1 Peter, specifically relying on the scholarship of both author, preacher, New Testament scholar, and womanist Dr. Shively T. J. Smith²⁰³ and Rev. Dr. Dennis R. Edwards. Both are New Testament scholars arguing the importance of a contextual understanding of diaspora and how that informs the structure, practices, and identity of the community. 1 Peter is an example of a diverse community of Jesus followers who practice an inverse of power given their context; the societal marginalized are centered as powerful and most authentic in their leadership toward God's intended community.

First Peter is a letter that is rich and layered with themes of community, suffering, faithfulness, and identity as new Christians in a hostile, unjust world. It is a word of encouragement for the marginalized, a balm for the broken, a map of survival, and a guide toward living in an alternative way in a dominant society. It is a word to God's family — though not biological kin, but as Smith states in *Strangers to Family*, “chosen kinship.”²⁰⁴ The letter is written to Christians living in a society that viewed them as outsiders and a threat to their dominant order and norms. Edwards, New Testament scholar, professor at North Park Theological Seminary, and former senior pastor at The Sanctuary, describes the audience of 1 Peter in his commentary on the letter as people

²⁰³ Other relevant works by Shively T. J. Smith include “One More Time with Assata on My Mind,” in *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible*, ed. Gay L. Byron and Vanessa Lovelace (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2016) and “Strengths and Gaps of Foundations for Sociorhetorical Exploration,” in *Welcoming the Nations*, ed. Vernon K. Robbins and Roy Jeal (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2019).

²⁰⁴ Shively T. J. Smith, *Strangers to Family: Diaspora and 1 Peter's Invention of God's Household* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 21.

who “were subjected to local social tensions, suspicions, and alienation.”²⁰⁵ They were treated in such a way because in their attempt to live out the way of Jesus, they were treated unfairly by the dominant culture.²⁰⁶ These new Christians “struggled to live the Lord’s teachings while being mocked, slandered, and otherwise alienated by their unbelieving neighbors.”²⁰⁷ Smith describes the audience of 1 Peter as a “vulnerable and scattered population that could respond to their situation a number of different ways.”²⁰⁸

The twenty-first century reader thus has many questions for the 1 Peter community. Likewise, The Sanctuary has pointed questions about primarily its identity, purpose, and structure as a faith community. The first question toward uncovering those answers centers on the identity of this oppressed readership — who were they? The second question Smith alludes to in the latter part of her statement above — how did they respond? The question of their response evokes their collective identity as a people. The third question encapsulates the sum of the first two questions: given who they were and how they responded, what implications did this have on their collective group structure toward their intended aim, and what does it mean for urban, multiethnic ministry centered on justice in the unforgettable year of 2020 and beyond? The answers to these questions

²⁰⁵ Dennis R. Edwards, *1 Peter*, The Story of God Bible Commentary, ed. Tremper Longman III and Scot McKnight (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2017), 20.

²⁰⁶ Edwards, *Might from the Margins*, 45.

²⁰⁷ Edwards, *Might from the Margins*, 45.

²⁰⁸ Smith, *Strangers to Family*, 1.

inform the importance of 1 Peter for the communal identity and the leadership structure at The Sanctuary.

As mentioned above, the audience of 1 Peter was a ridiculed, marginalized community trying to live out the mission of Jesus within a broader culture that did not adhere to and value the same beliefs as this ad hoc group. As a people, they were “variously located and mixed Jewish Gentile audiences (although predominantly Gentiles) located elsewhere and at a distance from the author.”²⁰⁹ But more particularly, 1 Peter 1:1 states these believers are “described as members of the diaspora.”²¹⁰ Their distinction as diasporic is important because from the beginning it evokes not only an understanding of who these early Christians were, but also elicits the collective mission, identity, and informed structure of the community in 1 Peter. Smith succinctly states the implications of the diasporic community in 1 Peter in her book, *Strangers to Family*:

The image of diaspora illustrates how this new ethnoreligious group is to function in its home environment while simultaneously existing separate from it. The letter is an insider correspondence, responding to the needs of a multicultural, scattered, and vulnerable population. It provides a new perspective on their precarious circumstances and a vision of their collective bearing of the stigma “Christian” (1 Pet 4:16). Furthermore, it supplies its readers with a strategy for functioning and surviving in environments prone to violent and aggressive reprisals for cultural difference and social deviance.²¹¹

Smith’s assessment of 1 Peter is important because she captures clearly the audience of the letter, their context, and overarching circumstances against the backdrop of the

²⁰⁹ Smith, *Strangers to Family*, 18.

²¹⁰ Edwards, *Might from the Margins*, 45.

²¹¹ Smith, *Strangers to Family*, 3.

broader dominant society. They were a people who lived “outside the mainstream.”²¹² Because of that, they applied their Christian faith through envisioning a new kind of community, structured apart from the dominant world, for survival toward their mission to remain faithful.

The early Christians in 1 Peter could have responded to their oppressive situation and their diaspora identity in many ways. They chose, however, to envision what was currently unimaginable. Their response began by forming and clarifying their collective identity as God’s people.²¹³ For them this identity formation was solidified in who they were as children of God, which dealt with their relationship with God. But their identity formation also related to their shared life together and with the broader society. Smith discusses identity formation as the imperative to “make three different social choices. It exhorts them to choose how they will relate to the outside world, to each other within the community, and to God and God’s created order.”²¹⁴ They must choose, based on their context, how to live into their diaspora identity in a faithful way as Christians.

The process of identity formation is one of reorientation. As God’s people, now saved and given new life in Jesus Christ, they now enter into what Smith calls “a new life orientation and a new way of being ‘God’s own people’ (1 Peter 2:9).”²¹⁵ The orientation as a new way of being includes an “embrace [of] their newfound identity as ‘Christian,’”

²¹² Edwards, *Might from the Margins*, 49.

²¹³ Smith, *Strangers to Family*, 4.

²¹⁴ Smith, *Strangers to Family*, 21.

²¹⁵ Smith, *Strangers to Family*, 19.

while also not completely unrooting their socio-cultural identity as Galatians.²¹⁶ It encourages them to be fully Christian in the context of their lived life; it is a call to be engaged still in their social location, but clothed as a Christian in that space. To be a diaspora Christian means to live “within while remaining different from [the] larger dominant culture and society.”²¹⁷ Thus reorientation forms them as God’s people not distant from the world, but living lives of faithfulness among the world (1 Peter 2:12). As a part of their collective identity formation as Christians meant they were to view each other as family.²¹⁸ Their familial identity was an active part of their calling. In fact, Smith depicts reorientation of group identity as very active when she states, “the letter depicts the readers as actively moving toward establishment of their own social community in their own land (1 Pet 1:4; 3:22; 5:10) with a global and celestial reach and kinship.”²¹⁹ One might express this newfound collective identity as *glocal kin*²²⁰ — a simultaneously global and local expression of familial identity based on their shared, reoriented life in Jesus.

But reorientation toward a new group identity should not be romanticized, for it came at great risk from external socio-political dominant powers, thus the group’s

²¹⁶ Smith, *Strangers to Family*, 35.

²¹⁷ Smith, *Strangers to Family*, 32.

²¹⁸ Smith, *Strangers to Family*, 25.

²¹⁹ Smith, *Strangers to Family*, 25.

²²⁰ *Glocal* is a term coined in the 1980s to refer to both agricultural and business strategies. It also became used widely in missiological studies.

multifaceted responses to their oppressors. The author of 1 Peter laid a foundation for his intended audience that while they were scattered people, susceptible to harsh treatment of those in the dominant society, they were to see themselves as family, and from that collective identity their response was one of both survival and resistance. After all, these diaspora Christians were under real attack from the dominant culture through “verbal assault, social ostracism, and even susceptible to random or systematic acts of capital punishment.”²²¹ The author knew constant struggle was their reality, so in some passages where it seems the author is asking the people to comply and sustain the oppressive system in place, instead, the author is pleading they survive such atrocities. It was a very intentional way of keeping them alive.²²²

In reading 1 Peter and verses that encourage compliance with the broad social order, one should not imply agreement with such unjust structures or God’s approval of such a system, instead it is a tactic of survival. When an unjust society forces obedience to oppressive powers, then compliance becomes the social contract of survival. “First Peter never encourages opposition leading to martyrdom; rather it advocates compliance and obedience as a strategic measure to avoid execution.”²²³ Similarly, the diaspora identity of the community in 1 Peter does not suggest the broader social power structures will change definitively because of this peculiar kind of community. After all, Smith reminds us, “Christianity does not erase the social contracts its members are subject to,

²²¹ Smith, *Strangers to Family*, 165.

²²² Smith, *Strangers to Family*, 165.

²²³ Smith, *Strangers to Family*, 66.

but it does advance an alternate social arrangement that coexists alongside it.”²²⁴ Instead, as she states, a newly imagined structure, identity, and community can still be formed despite the broader oppressive reality. But even in these passages of survival tactics, the author of 1 Peter interjects subversive systematic reorientations of power within their identity as *glocal kin* for the purpose of staying alive, while still resisting the power structure in place.

Smith states unequivocally that the audience of 1 Peter were managing “multiple power relations” in both their survival and resistance.²²⁵ As the people were navigating power, they were instructed multiple times to comply with such systems, norms, and structures. What they are also instructed to do as they navigate those toward survival, is the continued process of reorientation as Christ followers. Therefore, from the lens of 1 Peter as Smith argues, Christianity in 1 Peter is seen as “an alternate social system with its own communal standards.”²²⁶ In particular is the example of wives in relationship with their husbands within the structure of the Greco-Roman culture and now the new collective identity as diaspora Christians. Smith describes the reorientation of social systems in conjunction with societal standards and Christian standards through the example of husbands and wives:

...Wives are subject to a new orientation in which they have both voice and agency in both domestic and public spaces. Again, the Christian social system is projected as a separate experience from the Greco-Roman household. As members of the Christian household (1 Pet 4:17) as opposed to the Greco-Roman,

²²⁴ Smith, *Strangers to Family*, 77.

²²⁵ Smith, *Strangers to Family*, 83.

²²⁶ Smith, *Strangers to Family*, 78.

wives are considered equal members and siblings of their Christian husbands and fellow Christian brothers and sisters. As 1 Peter continues to address marriage relations in general, and husbands in particular, the demarcation between conventional Greco-Roman household expectations and the Christian version persists. The letter maintains a conventional understanding of the differences between men and women in heterosexual relationships by adopting Aristotle's natural hierarchy that states men are stronger than women (1 Pet 3:7). Given the authority and power 1 Peter assigns to husbands within the household, it is no wonder it tells wives to evangelize their husbands through deed, not speech (1 Pet 3:1-2). Yet the letter's address to Christian husbands also alludes to the alternate social system of Christianity. While the wives may be the "weaker vessels," they are also fellow Christians.... The effect is that 1 Peter flattens the patriarchal power structure in the Christian household.... Ultimately, 1 Peter presents two social arrangements of the household: the human structure and God's structure.... Its apparent extreme conservatism is in fact a means to an end: survival.²²⁷

Smith's words demonstrate the particular negotiations of power in the context of 1 Peter.

A wife's compliance with her husband, yet newfound identity as a Christian is addressed clearly in Smith's example. It affords the reader the opportunity to understand how to survive unjust systems of power, but also the reorientation that is possible within the community of believers. This is the posture and response of Christians in the context of 1 Peter as they managed the power relationships around them.

Therefore, what implications did their context and Christian identity have on their collective structure? In what ways did they organize themselves so that they might reach their aim toward being a truly "peculiar people," as 1 Peter 2:9 in the KJV states? How might their reorientations of power inform The Sanctuary today in its reorientation of power by being black-led? What parallels are present? What actions must The Sanctuary take in order to live out its vision toward racial justice with 1 Peter as a guide? These questions evoke the curiosity and the collective imagination of reorienting power at The

²²⁷ Smith, *Strangers to Family*, 78-79.

Sanctuary given its particular context in North Minneapolis and its founding vision as previously stated.

Both Smith and Edwards make it clear — God’s words to the people in 1 Peter were not for the powerful, intended to perpetuate systems of hierarchy and oppression. It was, instead, a letter “from the underclass for the underclass, not the overlord.”²²⁸ What is most applicable and noteworthy is Smith’s declaration that “one thing is clear, 1 Peter does not champion hegemonic arrangements and regulations of daily life as God’s preferred order.”²²⁹ Instead, as Edwards admonishes, “diaspora Christian, those who don’t quite fit into the dominant culture, are among the best teachers of what it means to follow Jesus.”²³⁰ 1 Peter is a community where the marginalized are uplifted as the most authentic examples of living a life centered on the counter-cultural way of faith, while also providing a more authentic, keen perspective to understand unjust systems given their objectification within them. As Mills was quoted earlier, a perspective from the underside of an unjust system is the one that is more likely to see the whole of such a system and therefore provide greater critique and direction in dismantling it and leading the mission toward rebuilding it, utilizing Lorde’s imagery at the start of the chapter. What tools are necessary?

²²⁸ Smith, *Strangers to Family*, 165.

²²⁹ Smith, *Strangers to Family*, 62.

²³⁰ Edwards, *Might from the Margins*, 46.

Smith outlines a tool that is particularly applicable to the contemporary church, especially at The Sanctuary. Given the context of diaspora in 1 Peter, the letter invites a theological “imaginative work” as it reminds modern readership that we are also “members of a diverse and vast kinship... [that has the ability to construct] a new reality.”²³¹ The theological exercise of imagination has the ability to remove oneself (or the faith community) from the dominant culture and systems to conceive structures, communities, and outcomes that are impossible in the dominant social structure and norms. The implications of such an exercise provokes new and innovative ways of imagining Christian community not simply for the sake of a different rhythm, routine, or experience, but for the purpose of achieving its aim toward justice and reimagining a restored society. The faith community can benefit from “reading 1 Peter as a kind of diaspora consciousness and narrative that imagines something so new it requires innovation in semantic definition and social construction.”²³² The theological exercise of imagination is a form of resistance against the dominant, oppressive structure and becomes the vision in which The Sanctuary might achieve its intended vision and close the gap from white normative, hegemonic reality toward more authentic pursuit of racial justice, particularly in North Minneapolis. Given the previously detailed context of The Sanctuary and the overarching themes in 1 Peter, a particular vision, structure, and leadership are necessary in achieving The Sanctuary’s pursuit in being an urban, multiethnic church centered on racial justice. Chapter two clearly detailed that the white

²³¹ Smith, *Strangers to Family*, 19.

²³² Smith, *Strangers to Family*, 19.

normative structure simply perpetuates the opposite outcome of Sanctuary's vision. So, what then is required; what's the overarching application of 1 Peter for The Sanctuary?

Conclusion

It would be simplistic to suggest the contemporary application of 1 Peter is simply to implore diversity at The Sanctuary. While diversity denotes something important, it is not the summation of justice. Instead, the contemporary application it is to recognize where the marginalized are asked to survive for the contentment of the dominant. It is to question where hegemonic structures impede on God's vision for reorientations of power toward authentic collective identity as Christ followers. It is to propagate authority to the marginalized so that unjust structures might actually be upended, as Lorde's quote so succinctly states at the beginning of the chapter.

Therefore, I have provided a contextual analysis of North Minneapolis where The Sanctuary is located for the purpose of examining why and how The Sanctuary was founded to be a black-led and black-centered multiethnic church. I further named the desired outcome of The Sanctuary to embody its value to be black-led and black-centered. In doing so, I have examined the ways white normativity is still the modus operandi at The Sanctuary and the interrogative methodologies black senior leading in particular ought to understand how their leadership, ideology, and theology serve the inclusive and justice-centered vision of The Sanctuary toward thwarting white normativity. Finally, I provided a biblical framework that supports this inversion of power at The Sanctuary through the context of 1 Peter. This chapter has asserted that The Sanctuary, in their pursuit to be a black-led, black-centered urban, multiethnic church

requires its people and leadership to assess its assimilation to white normative practices and structures and continue to lean into its particular vision of racial justice instead.

For too long, multiethnic churches like The Sanctuary have resigned themselves to the insufficient vision of a white person befriending a black person as the strategy to upend white supremacy. The approach of cross-racial friendships not only misses the point of 1 Peter, but is also steeped in white comfort and white hegemony based on the idea that individual relationships will eradicate collective, historical, systemic sins. The remedy and strategy can no longer be found in individual, optional relationships of a black person and white person, but must go beyond to collective strategy and actualized roles that truly dismantle oppressive systems toward the pursuit of God's justice. The work ahead for The Sanctuary, therefore, resides in contextual, strategic, biblical roles toward God's envisioned justice. The subject of black leadership has been the topic of both chapter two and chapter three. Now we turn to the vision of this project and a missing link, as I will contend, of represented power of ethnic minorities and embodied justice for Gospel restoration: white congregants yielding their power toward actualized visionary black leadership at The Sanctuary through what I assert as white followership.

PART 3: BRIDGING THE GAP

CHAPTER 4

WHITE FOLLOWERSHIP: WORKING TOWARD INVERTING POWER AND ACTIVE FOLLOWERSHIP FOR ACTUALIZED JUSTICE

“Look to diaspora people — those who have been pushed to the margins — in order to discern the way of Jesus.... Those who have been oppressed are the best teachers of the way of Christ.”²³³

—Dr. Dennis R. Edwards, *Might from the Margins*

In his book, *Might from the Margins*, Edwards argues clearly the imperative for dominant Christians to follow the examples of diaspora Christians (those that are marginalized by society), thus appropriating a more authentic faith in the model of Jesus. The question of why has been answered in the previous chapter regarding 1 Peter, but one simply needs to read the mission of Jesus in Luke 4:14-21 with a holistic lens to see the purpose and way of Jesus. Jesus’ mission was not only spiritual liberation to all bound in sin, but also social liberation from sinful systems that oppressed the marginalized. Therefore, as Edwards rightly states, the dominant need to take on the role as followers through the example and leadership of the diasporic, given the challenge in 1 Peter. The particularity of how the dominant follow is the purpose of the chapter and the specific task turns to bridging the gap between the problem and ultimate vision of this project. The task of chapter four is to bridge the gap between the vision of black-centered

²³³ Edwards, *Might from the Margins*, 51, 58.

leadership and experience toward The Sanctuary's ascribed vision from the reality of white dominance at The Sanctuary. Thus, the broad aim of chapter four concentrates on explicating the concept of white followership as a remedy and focusing on the reification of racial justice through the actualized behaviors and actions of white followership.

Before I state the overview of chapter four, I want to provide initial qualifiers. It is important to acknowledge that the remedial task of lessening the gap from problem to vision is not one-dimensional. There is not one solution, and instead it is a multifaceted approach that will take the work of the whole congregation and leadership structure of The Sanctuary. It requires healthy black leadership, a built and sustained relationship and trust between leaders and congregants, and particular willingness and commitment from white congregants. Also, given the scope of this project and the particular chapter, there is a need to address a solution of white dominance at The Sanctuary. Therefore, the scope of change outlined in the chapter will not be the exhaustive and the complete work required of The Sanctuary, but it is meant to be a step toward collective transformation through a theoretical and embodied framework. Finally, I intentionally chose to focus on white followership for this project; the particular facet of white followership is a primary focus for me because of my personal leadership role, identity, voice, and experience as a white female pastor at The Sanctuary leading spiritual formation ministries. Therefore, the chapter will focus on bridging the gap between the vision of black-centered leadership and experience for greater racial justice from the reality of white hegemony at The Sanctuary through the conceptual framework and embodied practices, which I call white followership.

The chapter will reveal that white followership, while a theoretical construct, can be applied in practical and theologically-rich modes by measuring change through contextual forms of analysis, which will follow in chapter five. Toward that end, I will address the following in the chapter: first, I will look at the business literature on the study of the concept of “followership,” primarily U.S. Department of Labor senior executive Dr. Patsy Baker Blackshear’s²³⁴ work on The Followership Continuum, which will provide a broad framework of the concept of followership and some common misconceptions that will enrich the particular construct of white followership. Second, I will outline my definition of white followership. Developing the definition of white followership will provide a more tangible imagination of what followership might look like at The Sanctuary. Third, using the conceptual framework of white followership, I will propose actualized, embodied practices white congregants can employ toward transforming systems and norms of white hegemony at The Sanctuary toward the realization of our vision. Within that I will utilize Blackshear’s particular definition of an exemplary follower and contextualize that to The Sanctuary. Utilizing Blackshear’s definition provides tangible practices and examples for The Sanctuary from a theoretical construct. Finally, I will utilize sociologist Dr. Jack Mezirow’s²³⁵ theory of

²³⁴ Other relevant works by Patsy Baker Blackshear include *Black and Gifted* (Reston, VA: ERIC Clearinghouse, 1980).

²³⁵ Other relevant works by Jack Mezirow include *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1991), *Learning as Transformation* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000), and *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1990).

transformative adult learning using the critical self-reflection as a guide toward practically implementing a shift toward white followership. Mezirow's theory will provide the sufficient, holistic, while still flexible, scaffolding in which to collectively imagine and build a new and more just structure, system, and organization.

What is Followership?

Followership is vital and leadership fails without careful consideration of an organization's followers. Considering the relationship and function of a leader and follower, logically there can be no leadership without followership. It sounds matter-of-fact and even obvious when considered that one is not possible without the other. They are integrally related and yet distinct in role and function. However, given that rational statement, leadership has been the focus of decades of research and attention. Yet followership has had far less attention, appeal, and research regarding it. As such, the "leadership industry" remains the focus of research, business, personal, and professional development — the hyper-focus of leadership is a widespread topic and massive money-making sector.²³⁶ A corpus of conferences, books, seminars, classes, and trainings focus on the topic of leadership: what a leader does, how to become an exemplary leader, and how to develop leaders within your organization or circle of influence. Leadership is a well-studied role. But how often do people find a book, attend a class, go to a conference, or receive a degree in the subject of being a great follower? It seems comical in our Western American cultural context to consider training people to be followers. In our

²³⁶ Barbara Kellerman, *Followership: How Followers are Creating Change and Changing Leaders* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2008), xvii.

highly individualized society who wants to be a follower when you could be a leader? Given American cultural ideals of individuality, success, wealth, and attention, what is appealing about being a follower? In her book *Followership*, Harvard University professor of public leadership Barbara Kellerman²³⁷ notes that Americans have a deep “aversion” for “being, or to be seen as being, one among many in a meek and mindless herd.”²³⁸ We want to be characterized as individuals and prosperous, and as Americans we have construed that characterization through the role and actions of leadership. But without a critical understanding of followership, can leadership actually be successful? Followers are vital to the leadership process and to any organization with a vision and actionable outcomes.

You cannot have a leader without followers — they are contingent upon one another. Leaders need followers to carry out a vision, and followers need a leader to cast the vision that is ahead. The two work in tandem. Could it be that so much of our energy around focusing on exemplary leaders is actually only the partial training, when the two are dependent upon one another? After all, where followership fails, not much actually gets accomplished. A deeper understanding of followership, particularly as it relates to centering black leadership at The Sanctuary, is necessary. While leadership studies still dominate the business world, followership is an increasingly growing area of research

²³⁷ Other relevant works by Barbara Kellerman include *The End of Leadership* (New York: Harper Business, 2012), *Bad Leadership* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2004), and *Professionalizing Leadership* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

²³⁸ Kellerman, *Followership*, 3.

within the business sector and leadership models, and it is important The Sanctuary understands more about it in the pursuit of its own vision.

What is followership? To answer this question, it is important to first note that little has been researched regarding the topic, role, and relationship of followership. In fact, Carsten, Harms, and Uhl-Bien in “Exploring Historical Perspectives of Followership” state, “in almost 150 years of leadership research, few scholars have attempted to really define and understand the concept of followership.”²³⁹ But in the work that has been done in business research and literature more recently, followership can be understood as a role associated with behaviors and practices, it is a relationship in union with a leader, and it is easily misunderstood.

Followership can be defined as a role one occupies that encompasses active behaviors and actions one engages in within a relationship to a leader (or leadership structure) in order to meet a collective, shared vision.²⁴⁰ But how often is followership perceived as that? Instead of viewed as a role and relationship, too often followership is deduced simply to a passive, flat, inferior positioning.²⁴¹ When such a misconception happens, we view followers as “submissive and subordinate...people who are somehow sub-par.”²⁴² But those are misconceptions of followership. Naming these and in turn

²³⁹ Laurent M. Lapierre and Melissa K. Carsten, *Followership: What Is It and Why Do People Follow?* (Bingley: Emerald Publishing, 2014), 4.

²⁴⁰ Lapierre and Carsten, *Followership*: 14.

²⁴¹ Patsy Baker Blackshear, “The Followership Continuum: A Model for Increasing Organizational Productivity,” *The Innovation Journal* 9, no. 1, article 7 (2004): 1-14, http://www.innovation.cc/discussion-papers/blackshear_fin_v9i7.pdf, 2.

naming the truth about followership will help refine the above definition. Therefore, the most common misconceptions of followership include misguided characteristics of the follower, a deficient-centered mindset of the role follower, and a flat and partial perspective of followership.

First, more often than not when people conceptualize the idea of followership, misguided characteristics of the follower emerge. Generally, within the United States a follower is misidentified as passive, overly compliant, deferential, and naïve. They are seen often as lacking willpower or uninterested, lacking prized leadership skills such as critical thinking, creativity, and problem solving. They are stereotyped as having little to offer an organization, the decision-making process, and overall work within the group.²⁴³ Can you imagine someone excitedly stating s/he is going to a conference on becoming a better follower? It is not something we value in the Western world. But in reality, we are all followers in some way and some are even simultaneously a leader and follower within the same context.²⁴⁴ Because it has been undervalued, followership has therefore been misconstrued.

Second, the role of follower is often unconsciously viewed as deficient, which poses a dangerous proposition of the nuanced and healthy relationship of leader and follower when they work in partnership together toward a shared goal. Often followers

²⁴² Blackshear, “The Followership Continuum,” 2.

²⁴³ Lapierre and Carsten, *Followership*, 10.

²⁴⁴ Allen Hamlin, Jr., *Embracing Followership: How to Thrive in a Leader-Centric Culture* (Bellingham, WA: Kirkdale Press, 2016), 5.

are viewed inversely to leaders. If a person is a follower, then s/he lacks leadership qualities and are demoted to the role of a follower. Carsten, Harms, and Uhl-Bien agree many believe the falsehood that if a leader is “strong, wise, brave, visionary and articulate, then followers are not.”²⁴⁵ Such a deduction of a follower’s role and value hinders a follower’s actualized potential and necessity within the organization. A more robust perspective is required. Because, as Carsten, et al. state, when “followers are depicted as weak, ineffectual individuals who rely on leaders to coordinate daily operations,” then such a misunderstanding unintentionally and unknowingly poses a great threat to the overall vision of the organization.²⁴⁶ Such an unconscious deficient mindset produces actualized threats to the leader attempting to lead an organization toward a set goal or outcome. With a flat or partial understanding of followership comes not only misunderstandings, but actualized misguided perceptions that shape the organization and its vision. For example, when followership is deduced and identified with strong overtones of flat obedience, then it impairs the vital role of the follower in relation to the leader and thus likely will produce passivity within the organization.²⁴⁷

Thus, succinctly put, followership as defined above is both a role and relationship toward a shared purpose. Unlike the partial and misguided views of followers above, followers are “capable, innovative individuals who simply do not occupy” a leadership

²⁴⁵ Lapierre and Carsten, *Followership*, 9.

²⁴⁶ Lapierre and Carsten, *Followership*, 13.

²⁴⁷ Lapierre and Carsten, *Followership*, 12.

role.²⁴⁸ Or, as Kellerman describes in her book, *Followership*, followers are “unleaders,” meaning “they are without particular power, without positions of authority, and without special influence,” yet “good followership matters — a great deal.”²⁴⁹ Kellerman’s delineation of power for followers is of particular importance in the context of The Sanctuary given white congregants’ normative power they hold in society and thus at The Sanctuary if not understood or yielded with intentionality. Stating followers are without a particular power within the organization is important and yet white people often need to be educated on how to do that. This is why white followership is necessary.

Seeing as how followership is not a deficit of the followers’ character or traits, but instead a different role and “one that is critical to the effective performance of leadership, it is important to unearth the healthy characteristics of a follower in contrast to stereotypical passive followers.”²⁵⁰ In fact, Carsten, et al. found in their research that organizations benefit from active engagement of followers with their leaders.²⁵¹ A kind of active followership like Carsten, et al. describes can also be understood as “co-producers of leadership,” and it highlights the ways leaders and followers work in partnership through mutual “influence and engagement” toward greater ownership of the curated vision and subsequent course of action toward its realization.²⁵² Carsten, et al. calls this

²⁴⁸ Lapierre and Carsten, *Followership*, 14.

²⁴⁹ Kellerman, *Followership*, xx, 7.

²⁵⁰ Kellerman, *Followership*, 14.

²⁵¹ Kellerman, *Followership*, 8.

²⁵² Kellerman, *Followership*, 9.

follower the “proactive follower.”²⁵³ The proactive follower “directly contradicts the traditional view of followers as passive and ineffectual.”²⁵⁴ In fact research showed that when followers saw themselves in a proactive way, they modeled characteristics often associated with leadership, such as taking initiative, thinking critically, solving problems, working toward a shared goal, voicing their ideas and input, and seeing the value of their role.²⁵⁵ In fact, Kellerman encourages the normalization and value of followership and in so doing she keenly observes, “curiously, counterintuitively, what it takes to be a good follower looks a lot like what it takes to be a good leader.”²⁵⁶ Active followership is in stark contrast to the passive follower seen as “silent” and “with little to offer.”²⁵⁷ Understanding such a delineation provides more nuance to the role of follower and empowers followership as helpful in redefining the construct. It is important because it gives a fuller picture to white congregants of The Sanctuary looking to actively participate in the work of justice, yet have a particular role in that work and within the church community. Understanding the role of follower also provides a helpful foundation to then build upon to understand even more particularly the role and relationship of a follower and then the implications for white followership at The Sanctuary.

²⁵³ Kellerman, *Followership*, 17.

²⁵⁴ Kellerman, *Followership*, 17.

²⁵⁵ Kellerman, *Followership*, 17.

²⁵⁶ Kellerman, *Followership*, 236.

²⁵⁷ Lapierre and Carsten, *Followership*, 18.

With the above as a foundation of reframing followership, it is important to now look at Blackshear's particular work, and specifically her definition of an exemplary follower. In doing so, it will reveal the particular role and relationship the follower has with the leader and therefore its implications toward the shared outcome. Blackshear has led in the areas of local and federal government, private industry, and public education largely in Baltimore, Maryland and Washington, D.C.²⁵⁸ In her research on followership, she seeks to normalize and refine the popular view of followership. She normalizes and redefines followership in stating, "followers and followership exist in every walk of life...wherever there are leaders there are followers. Wherever there are groups there are followers. Followers occur as a natural condition of organized efforts. She defines successful followership as built on the "belief in an organization's mission, vision or purpose, willingness to subjugate personal interest for the greater good, loyalty, and unity of focus."²⁵⁹

Given these signifiers of followership, Blackshear describes a continuum of followership. Blackshear's continuum addresses "five stages of dynamic and changing followership."²⁶⁰ These stages include stages 1 to 5 with 1 being the least committal and 5 being exemplar. Beginning with the first stage is simply the "employee," Blackshear describes the first stage as simply doing work in return for some benefit, namely

²⁵⁸ Blackshear, "The Followership Continuum," 13.

²⁵⁹ Blackshear, "The Followership Continuum," 3.

²⁶⁰ Blackshear, "The Followership Continuum," 5.

compensation in the workplace.²⁶¹ Stage two is the “committed follower” who takes an interest in the “mission, idea, organization,” or has some deeper desire to an “effort or person.”²⁶² Stage three describes the “engaged follower” who “is an active supporter, willing to go above and beyond” what is expected or required.²⁶³ Looking ahead to stage four, Blackshear notes the “effective follower” who is described as “capable and dependable.”²⁶⁴ Finally at stage five, Blackshear describes the “exemplary follower.”²⁶⁵ Blackshear describes the exemplary follower as someone who “sets ego aside and works to support the leader. They lead themselves.”²⁶⁶ In particular, from over 300 surveys conducted by Blackshear, she identified “eight critical exemplary followership characteristics” and she uses them to outline her definition of an exemplary follower.

They include:

1. Willing to set ego aside and function as a team player,
2. Self-empowered or internal locus of control with initiative and a willingness to act,
3. Persists or has staying power,

²⁶¹ Blackshear, “The Followership Continuum,” 5.

²⁶² Blackshear, “The Followership Continuum,” 5.

²⁶³ Blackshear, “The Followership Continuum,” 5.

²⁶⁴ Blackshear, “The Followership Continuum,” 5.

²⁶⁵ Blackshear, “The Followership Continuum,” 5.

²⁶⁶ Blackshear, “The Followership Continuum,” 5.

4. Entrepreneurial in approach and spirit with a focus on taking risk to accomplish results and doing what's necessary to get things done,
5. More proactive as a problem fixer rather than reactive as a problem identifier,
6. Adaptable, flexible and capable to manage change,
7. Optimistic or is positive in approach, and
8. Pursues continuous improvement and engages in personal development to achieve competence.²⁶⁷

From my experience as a white woman pastoring in the area of spiritual formation at The Sanctuary, I find the above definition and characteristics to be applicable, adaptable, and important in reimagining white congregants' role, relationship, and positionality in the work of racial justice. In the next section, the following task is to ignite an imagination in contextualizing Blackshear's definition into a construct toward Sanctuary's intended vision.

What is White Followership?

Often racial reconciliation, primarily in evangelical churches, has been diluted to, as Walker-Barnes notes, "feelings and friendship."²⁶⁸ In fact, she names the prevailing myth in evangelical multiethnic churches that "assumes that increasing interpersonal contact between people of different races will reduce feelings of racial hostility. But racism is ultimately not about our relationships or our feelings" and instead it is about the

²⁶⁷ Blackshear, "The Followership Continuum," 8.

²⁶⁸ Walker-Barnes, *I Bring the Voices of My People*, 62.

complex infiltration of white supremacy and the “interlocking forms of power that maintain it.”²⁶⁹ So what is to be done to pry white supremacy and power from the work toward the vision of the multiethnic church, primarily at The Sanctuary? I submit, based on the research, examples, and perspectives laid out in previous chapters and above, the construct of white followership. The construct of white followership addresses the power white congregants possess within the structure of the multiethnic church, the need for centering the leadership of our black pastor, the necessity of the experience of our black, indigenous, and congregants of color, and ultimately the aim of our church toward God’s vision of reconciliation, restoration, and justice.²⁷⁰ Again, as noted above, white followership is not the only answer toward bridging the gap necessary at The Sanctuary and is not meant to become another version of the white savior complex that positions white people remedying a problem; instead, white followership is one facet in the work of transformation needed at The Sanctuary. The sections ahead encompass the imaginative and tangible work of conceptualizing white followership.

In the above section I laid the groundwork of defining followership and then using Blackshear’s concept of The Followership Continuum. I also state that the work of

²⁶⁹ Walker-Barnes, *I Bring the Voices of My People*, 62.

²⁷⁰ The scope of this project addresses specifically black leadership and white followership. As white followership is applied at The Sanctuary, discussing and defining the role and place of non-black, non-white congregants of color is vital as the church seeks to become authentically multiethnic. A possible next step beyond the particular features mentioned thus far could include a conversation with congregants of color regarding The Sanctuary’s identity to be black-centered while also growing as a multiethnic community. Such a conversation would broaden and enliven the applied praxis of white followership.

racial reconciliation requires more than trite interpersonal relationships of white and black or brown people. In so doing, I propose the following definition of white followership as *a construct that addresses racist power imbalances and the limited subjectivity of white power due to white supremacy. White followership is not simply the inversion of Black-centered leadership. The two work in tandem toward the intended outcomes and vision. White followership denotes both a role and a relationship toward an emphasis, or centering, of black leadership and experience. White followership, specifically, denotes a form of engagement in the work of racial reconciliation that emphasizes the black experience and the role of leadership in a more central position. White followership is also categorized as a role in terms of defining characteristics, as expressed in Blackshear's definition of an exemplary follower, in relation to the context of racial reconciliation.* Using the above definition, therefore, white followership is a *role and relationship* toward an intentional *outcome* or emphasis.

White followership as a role provides a framework as well as practical characteristics for white congregants at The Sanctuary. But first, our language is important. In the historical work of racial reconciliation in evangelical settings as well as broadly within social justice work, language has been important in defining white peoples' role in the work toward justice. In the early 2000's the term *advocate* was popular. *Advocate* evoked the idea that because I had power as a white person, I could speak and act on behalf of marginalized people toward justice. *Advocate*, however, still perpetuated a power imbalance over oppressed groups, assumed black, indigenous, and people of color were unable to speak or act for themselves, and also perpetuated the

notion that white people had the remedy and were the saviors of racism. Another term made popular more recently during the Black Lives Matter movements is *ally*. *Ally*, though used in the 1980's in multicultural education work, became popular more recently, especially more so in conjunction with the LGBTQ movement.²⁷¹ In days following Floyd's murder in Minneapolis, terms such as *co-conspirator* and *accomplice* have bubbled to the forefront as well. While the purpose is not to obsess over a term, our language does matter. With the language of the social justice movement there has yet to be one that addresses the very real and dangerous power that white people possess in the United States. Therefore, white followership is a term that addresses that necessary power shift in role toward true racial justice based on Kellerman's definition that a follower is intentionally someone "*without* particular power."²⁷² But how might white people at The Sanctuary yield their power in tangible ways? That question will be addressed in a moment.

Beyond language though, followership, as evidenced above, provides a clear role for white people in the work of dismantling white supremacy while addressing their power. Followership should need be viewed from a deficient mindset, such as passive compliant, uninterested, or weak. When viewed from that perspective within a white followership lens, then white people can be a great threat to the work of racial reconciliation. From that perspective, they are not aware of the power they bring because

²⁷¹ Micki McElya, "Who Is An Ally?," *Boston Review*, December 30, 2019, <http://bostonreview.net/gender-sexuality/micki-mcelya-history-social-justice-ally>.

²⁷² Kellerman, *Followership*, xx.

they are passive in the work; they simply do not put the work in because they are uninterested, and because of their unawareness of their power, they perceive themselves as not a part of the work of dismantling injustice. That is a very dangerous position for white people to be in; it carelessly hurts black leaders in roles of authority, and it directly threatens the vision of reconciliation. White followers must understand their role in the organization. It is important to remember Carsten, et al. and the description of a proactive follower. An active kind of follower is not passive; they clearly understand their role, and take initiative toward the shared outcome. Describing and proposing white followership as a viable methodology for The Sanctuary does not conclude white people will never have a place of leadership within the church, because that is not the overall mission of the Christian movement. Instead, it is emphasizing the need for white people to learn the particularities of following the leadership of a person of color — something many white people have never had to do before coming to The Sanctuary. Again, aware and committed followers often have attributes similar to that of a leader. The difference though, is the understanding of their role and how their power relates to the leader and overall organization.

Practicing White Followership

For a deeper understanding of the role of a white follower, it is necessary to go back to Blackshear's definition of an exemplary follower. First, her definition of successful followership centered on an embrace of the organization's mission and vision, a willingness to humble one's own interests and perspectives for the greater good of the vision, a strong loyalty, and a unified focus toward the vision. Blackshear's definition

helpfully frames white followership as actively and consciously yielding power, a call to humility, a long-term commitment to the work of racial reconciliation, and a commitment to the communal work. Going even further with Blackshear's definition of an exemplary follower, her description actually states a follower could be the leader, but instead actively chooses to set their ego aside, actively supports the leader, and also takes initiative to lead in their own work.²⁷³ Blackshear's definition that positions a follower as active and even holding characteristics of a leader, brings a deeper texture to the definition of white followership for The Sanctuary. Many white people coming to The Sanctuary have been in or reside in roles of significant leadership — they have skills, or at least the confidence, to lead in the work of racial justice — but what is actually needed is the willingness to set their ego and personal interests, preferences, and cultural norms aside to support black leadership. In following black leadership, they do not simply become passive, disengaged lemmings, and instead work actively at their own journey toward anti-racism and then disciple other white congregants along the journey. The role of a white follower is active, necessary, and will be a reorienting experience for many white congregants as well as a journey of redisciplining.

Theological Shifts of White Followership

The example of the community in 1 Peter clearly showed already the imperative for reorienting power toward exemplifying the mission of God, but what other theological shifts are necessary for white congregants as they begin to process white followership? If white followership is a part of redisciplining white congregants at The

²⁷³ Blackshear, "The Followership Continuum," 5.

Sanctuary, then white congregants must identify theological shift away from Eurocentrism that impedes followership. Before explaining white followership at The Sanctuary, I need to first provide a theological grounding for such a method. While these are not exhaustive, I believe there are seven theological shifts white congregants at The Sanctuary must employ as they embody active followership.

Jesus' first command to his new disciples was not a primer on leadership nor was it an attractive offer for the spotlight, fame, or success. Jesus' first command to his disciples was simply, "Come, *follow me*" found in Matthew 4:19.²⁷⁴ Later, as the disciples had more time following Rabbi Jesus, they began discovering incrementally who Jesus was and saw displays of God's work through him. As Peter declares that indeed Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, then Jesus affirms again the role of a disciple of Christ when he says in Matthew 16:24, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and *follow me*."²⁷⁵ Given Jesus' commands to his disciples, it is clear our role as disciples is to follow — follow the example of Jesus he set during his life exemplified through Scripture. Further, as disciples of Jesus striving to follow his example, it is clear we have to shift our perspectives from ourselves toward others.

Given Matthew 16:24, denying ourselves implies a shift of emphasis from the individual to others; taking up one's cross is a denial of our own priorities and our cultural whiteness, and a shift to the sacrifice for others. Matthew 16:24 is a theological,

²⁷⁴ Emphasis mine.

²⁷⁵ Emphasis mine.

social, worldview shift. So as white Christians seeking the liberation of those oppressed by the powerful, what reorientations are needed before examining white followership? I want to suggest seven theological shifts that are the foundational of white followership. They include the following shifts: 1) individual to communal, 2) opponent to family, 3) intellectual to embodied, 4) expert to lifelong learner, 5) reactionary discipleship to proactive discipleship, 6) hero or the one oppressed to the oppressor, and 7) perfection to faithfulness. These shifts will ground white Christians in the theological imperatives of white followership.

First, the shift from individual to communal is important. Given American culture and values, the individual is prioritized above the collective. Americans, especially white Americans, are socialized to be autonomous, thinking first of one's self before others. But Jesus is clear in Matthew 16 that we must actually deny ourselves in order to follow his example as disciples and in turn serve others and think of the community over the individual. The denial white Christians are called to is the denial of the myths of whiteness and instead to the imperatives of our faith that are counter to the dominance of whiteness. In considering how white Christians understand their faith and its action, a shift from solely individual formation, piety, and emphasis must shift to communal. After all, critical whiteness studies often reveal the lack of formed group identity among white dominant people because whiteness culturally employs and centers individuality as a value.²⁷⁶ But individuality is not the example of Jesus. Instead, Jesus' mission statement

²⁷⁶ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Carla Goar, and David G. Embrick, "When Whites Flock Together: The Social Psychology of White Habitus," *Critical Sociology* 32, no. 2-3 (March 2006): 229-53, 230.

in Luke 4 clearly prioritizes the needs of the oppressed, imprisoned, and poor. For white Christians to prioritize others beyond themselves requires a communal outlook, seeking the best for others. White Christians ought to ask themselves in their spiritual formation journey how to make the shift toward the community from the individual for the sake of the growth of the Kingdom of God. A simple actionable step would be during one's individual Bible study to think not only what a passage means for the individual Christian, but how might it be enacted and realized communally for the good of all, especially those most vulnerable.

Second, given the fact that whiteness prioritizes the individual over the community, it is also important that white Christians shift their mindset of other white folks as potential opponents to family. What I mean by a familial identification of other white people is all too often white Christians, myself included, who begin their journey of racial awareness toward racial justice perceive other white people who may still be ignorant to racism and white supremacy as an opponent in the journey of anti-racism, instead of as a part of their broader, figurative white family. Again, the individualized perspective creates another hierarchy placing the more aware white folks above those who have yet to become aware. Such a perspective not only produces another hierarchy, but it fails to see another human being as part of God's creation and limits the relationship, connection, and reconciliation that might be possible given a different posture. When we see other white folks as part of our white family and empathize that we also once exhibited similar beliefs and actions, then we provide a greater space of bridge-building and reconciliation grounded in empathy. Showing deeper understanding is

needed for every person on the journey toward anti-racism. We are all a part of God's collective family and as Christians we need to employ such truth with one another.

Third, the work toward anti-racism is not only an intellectual exercise where gaining knowledge, facts, history, and ideas are the summation. Instead, white Christians need to shift their focus from only intellectual pursuits in understanding white supremacy to also embodied practices that are actionable. Jesus made it clear through his examples and commands that the work of the Kingdom is not only what we believe and think about, but also what we do in collaboration with God. An active view of the Christian faith is demonstrated in Jesus' mission statement in Luke 4 when he proclaimed his work as the Messiah was to set prisoner's free, fill up the poor and needy, heal those suffering, and raise up the oppressed. Our faith is active and therefore as Christians, our pursuit of justice is also active. Working toward anti-racism as white Christians requires a shift to the actual practices we engage through our discipleship journey.

Fourth, as white Christians seeking racial justice our pursuit is not to become an expert in the work of racial justice, but to be a lifelong learner. For many white people, we believe we are supposed to grow to a point where we become experts in the area of racial justice and thus become fluent in its dialect and proficient in all things race-related. When in actuality, the journey of anti-racism is lifelong just like our faith. There is no arrival, finish line, or expert. Instead, occupying a posture of humility and the acknowledgement that we will make many mistakes, white Christians need to shift their priority from becoming an expert to becoming a lifelong learner in the work of anti-racism.

Fifth, there is a need to shift from reactionary discipleship of white Christians to holistic, proactive discipleship in the work of anti-racism. As mentioned previously, in the wake of Floyd's death, many white Christians sought out Sanctuary's leadership for responses and action steps. They were in a position of reacting to the cultural, social, racial crisis and were looking for advice on how to respond faithfully. While I am glad they sought counsel and collaboration, it reveals that most white pastors are unable to develop proactive, holistic discipleship that addresses racism apart from the impetus of national racial tensions. The work of anti-racism on the part of white Christians and the practice of white followership cannot only be enacted during moments of overt anti-black crises. Instead, it must be integrated in proactive, holistic discipleship. Adhering to a lifestyle of anti-racism is why allyship or advocacy is not enough for the white Christian — white followership toward racial reconciliation and justice is the deeper challenge.

Sixth, it is important for white Christians to shift their biblical and theological identification from the hero or one oppressed to the reality and role of oppressor. This is a difficult but necessary shift. It is best illustrated through my own personal experience. Far too often in my own spiritual journey when I read the Bible, I identified with the hero of the story or those being oppressed, instead of the oppressor in power. For example, I came to a powerful realization one day when I considered the biblical account of Moses and the Israelites. In studying it I found myself identifying with the Israelites, seeking liberation and God's favor as God's people, or comparing my personal leadership skills or habits with that of Moses, the hero of this story. I had not ever until that point, however, considered the ways in which I held normative power akin to Pharaoh. I had not

considered it before because of course the comparison is not exact; there are clear socio-political differences between myself and Pharaoh. But I did realize when I identified with the person in power in the biblical account, I allowed the Holy Spirit to prompt self-reflective questions regarding faith, race, and power I had not before that realization. This shift from seeing myself in the biblical text as the hero or oppressed to the one in power has changed how I study the Bible, my personal faith journey, and how I teach the Scriptures to white congregants. This is a needed theological shift for white congregants on their journey toward white followership.

Finally, white Christians need to make the shift from making the journey of racial justice defined by perfection and instead to a journey of faithfulness. The purpose of anti-racism is not to be perfect or avoid making mistakes. Instead, mistakes are expected and a part of the journey. White Christians seeking to be faithful and committed to racial reconciliation, acknowledge failure will happen and grace is always available. Like our journey of faith, it is less about avoiding every sin and vice and instead growing as faithful followers of Christ who seek the ways of God. Both are seeking to avoid sin, but from different vantage points. The work of white Christians in beginning the journey of white followership is to be faithful to God's will and committed to the work of justice. The above shifts provide the grounding foundation for white followership that will enrich and nourish the lifelong journey of racial justice.

Features of White Followership at The Sanctuary

What then is white followership for white Christians at The Sanctuary? Much has been said to define followership and specifically white followership at The Sanctuary.

But now a deeper look at the role of white followership, particularly the features of it from Blackshear’s eight critical characteristics listed above is necessary. For the importance of this project, I seek to contextualize Blackshear’s eight critical characteristics of an exemplary follower and begin to contextualize them to white followership. Just as there is not one kind of leader, there is not one kind of follower. There are multifaceted ways to be a follower. Much is needed in developing how followership can contribute to the work of justice. I do not seek to provide an exhaustive list of characteristics and actions for white congregants at The Sanctuary. Instead, I begin the work of outlining white followership by applying Blackshear’s definition of an exemplary follower to the context of The Sanctuary toward the vision of racial justice. From there it is the collective work of our community to imagine its greater potential, place, varieties, and purpose.

Therefore, the chart below provides a framework for defining the construct of white followership through practical characteristics and behaviors, grounded in Blackshear’s definition of an exemplary follower. The below chart demonstrates the particularities of white followership with first an overarching statement of the characteristic and then a brief explanation of each. Each contextualized characteristic or behavior illuminates the facets of white followership for the purpose of defining and moving toward practical employment of white followership at The Sanctuary.

BLACKSHEAR’S DEFINITION OF EXEMPLARY FOLLOWERSHIP	WHITE FOLLOWERSHIP AT SANCTUARY COVENANT CHURCH
Willing to set ego aside and function as a team player	White followers understand their power and yield their power to BIPOC leaders in a humble posture

	<p>White followers understand their power and therefore consciously yield their power toward the emphasis of black leadership and experience. White followers embody a posture of humility, knowing they don't need to be perfect in dismantling racism, while keeping the larger and longer vision in mind. They seek the communal vision shared by their leader of color above their own interests or preferences. They seek to continually understand how their individualized perspective of faith has hindered the communal imperative of Christianity. It also requires deference to perspectives, decisions, and cultural preferences they may not initially understand or choose themselves, but they understand its purpose toward the greater vision.</p>
<p>Self-empowered or internal locus of control with initiative and a willingness to act</p>	<p>White followers are active in their anti-racist journey As white followers understand the power they possess, they then use it toward the work of justice and refrain from inaction when action is necessary. Such active character negates followership as passive and instead understands the spaces their elevated power and influence is needed and when it is a hindrance. White followers understand their power and use it in subversive ways toward oppression.</p>
<p>Persists or has staying power</p>	<p>White followers are committed to the lifelong journey of anti-racism and persist through discomfort White followers persist through difficulty and discomfort. They understand the tendency toward fragility and persist even when it is personally difficult or they may disagree. They see that anti-racism is a lifelong journey and not a process that is ever completed. Given that it is a lifelong journey, white followership is also a journey of mistakes and extending grace</p>

	toward one's self and others, which produces persistence.
Entrepreneurial in approach and spirit with a focus on taking risk to accomplish results and doing what's necessary to get things done	White followers take risks that will result in intentional loss of privilege toward true solidarity White followers have skin in the game and know anti-racism work will require personal sacrifice and intentional loss of privilege. It also means they seek to understand the systems and structures of white supremacy to then use that knowledge to help imagine and create more just outcomes alongside black leaders. They may not initially understand why a decision was made or a process preferred, but does what is necessary to work communally toward the vision and gain understanding.
More proactive as a problem fixer rather than reactive as a problem identifier	White followers are curious and communal in their approach to problem-solving White followers inquire with curiosity to leaders of color, instead of dictating outcomes or solutions. They work collaboratively toward an action or outcome. If a problem arises, they use the skills, tools, knowledge, and persistence they have gained to address an issue, instead of reacting in fragility.
Adaptable, flexible and capable to manage change	White followers know anti-racist work is evolving and they are adaptable to those changes White followers are adaptable, flexible, and capable to manage change, particularly when cultural differences arise. They are able to navigate the density of anti-racist work, even when it is complex or difficult or may even feel contradicting at times (ex. Knowing when to speak up and when to remain silent and listen).
Optimistic or is positive in approach	White followers maintain a growth mindset instead of a fixed mindset toward anti-racism

	White followers approach their fragility with a sense of self-efficacy and agency. They adhere to a growth mindset, instead of a fixed mindset toward anti-racism work.
Pursues continuous improvement and engages in personal development to achieve competence	White followers control the depth and breadth of their lifelong journey of anti-racism and hold themselves to a high standard White followers recognize that disrupting white supremacy is lifelong work and there is no completion to the work of racial justice. They commit to the learning and relearning, discipling and rediscipling that the anti-racism journey requires. They are in control of and active in their journey of awareness. They seek to be held to a high standard instead of settling for thin expectations.

Table 1: Blackshear’s Exemplary Followership Contextualized to the Construct of White Followership at The Sanctuary

From the above chart, it is clear that anti-racism work is vast, multifaceted, active, and lifelong. The role and characteristics of a white follower at The Sanctuary are indeed many, but are not unmanageable. Working toward these actions requires, however, a clear relationship between leader and follower.

As white followership encompasses a relationship, it is imperative white congregants at The Sanctuary realize that the quality of their followership does not only impact them, but also leadership and in turn the vision of the church. Thus, a leader and follower are contingent upon one another — where followership lacks, even strong leadership cannot make up for the deficiency of the followers. In turn, even eager, willing, and capable followership cannot off set lacking leadership. They rely on one another. Therefore, healthy black leadership at The Sanctuary goes hand-in-hand with

healthy white followership.²⁷⁷ Throughout this project, I assume that black leadership at The Sanctuary seeks to be healthy, inclusive, and faithful to Scripture and yet, healthy black leadership, pastoring an evangelical multiethnic church, encompasses an entire project and pursuit in and of itself. After all, Blackshear notes, “an exemplary follower could encounter negative influences that reduce followership output level” from poor leadership just as the inverse that healthy black leadership can “increase output levels.”²⁷⁸ Because they rely on one another, work toward the collective outcome relies on a cohesive, agreed-upon, committed, healthy relationship for the sake of the broader work of justice. In short, where white followership fails, progress toward racial justice is hindered.

But it should be noted that the relationship the two share as leader and follower is not one of flat positionality, meaning to obsess over the role of leader versus follower is not the point. The intent of the construct of white followership is not to create another oppressive hierarchy. Yes, the leader is positioned above the followers within the structure, but that does not mean it has to recreate another harmful hierarchy. In fact, there is both a contextual and biblical imperative, as already discovered in past chapters, for a black pastor to lead white congregants in the work of Gospel-centered reconciliation

²⁷⁷ Multiethnic churches, including The Sanctuary, applying white followership should consider with intentionality how emotional health is foundational to pursuing the construct of white followership. As an example, The Sanctuary, knowing the important of emotional maturity and cultivating a multiethnic community, has engaged in church-wide studies relating to emotional and spiritual health to provide leaders and congregants the necessary tools to process topics such as power, conflict, communication, etc.

²⁷⁸ Blackshear, “The Followership Continuum,” 6.

and justice in our society; it means something significant for white congregants to follow the lead of a black pastor. Because white people already have power, even in a multiethnic church with a black pastor. It is clear from chapter two that white preferences and predilections are prioritized in the multiethnic church. The solution therefore, cannot be avoiding the power they bring. Walker-Barnes emphasizes the need to name power imbalances when she states churches working toward racial reconciliation cannot use the “symmetrical treatment approach” that “is the foundation of color blindness [and] treats all racial identities as the same” and it “ignores markers of difference.”²⁷⁹

Utilizing a symmetrical treatment approach is dangerous in an evangelical multiethnic church like The Sanctuary because it ignores racial, social, political, economic, and even theological contextual differences and the significance of those disparities, and then fails to address the real problem at hand of white supremacy.²⁸⁰ Instead it is imperative within the construct of white followership to delineate between a justice-centered positionality of power that rightly centers black leadership and indemnifies dignity versus yet another oppressive-bent hierarchy where an act of power takes away dignity from another human. The latter produces an oppressive ordering of people for the sake of power, whereas the former is a hierarchy but it restores the worth, power, and necessity of the personhood and leadership of the marginalized. While it is still a hierarchy, it provides a preferential order to the oppressed for the sake of restoration. Maybe then, egalitarian ideals ought to be rethought of in the context of

²⁷⁹ Walker-Barnes, *I Bring the Voices of My People*, 41.

²⁸⁰ Walker-Barnes, *I Bring the Voices of My People*, 42.

prioritizing the oppressed that produces greater power to the powerless for the purpose of a more egalitarian outcome. Such a structure is more desirable because it mimics more authentically the call of discipleship by Christ and restores what white supremacy has marred through its redemptive priorities and practices.

Therefore, it should be made clear that white followership does not seek to perpetuate another oppressive hierarchy. As a feminist, it is not my intent to create more power structures that require passive submission in the church; the church has enough awful, abusive history of creating such a dynamic. Instead, white followership is about a structure that in centering black leadership and perspectives, repositions power in a more just way and also creates a potentially reparative structure toward dignity and justice. But it should be noted that in order to cease the perpetuation of patriarchal hierarchies that harm women, especially women of color, where black male leaders are leading multiethnic churches, it is imperative they be willing to be followers themselves of the wisdom of womanist intersectionality toward their pursuit of holistic biblical justice. Doing so has the power to truly affect change within and by the multiethnic church. After all, Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire's²⁸¹ words are guiding wisdom for pastors in multiethnic churches, "leaders who do not act diagonally, but insist on imposing their decisions, do not organize the people — they manipulate them. They do

²⁸¹ Other relevant works by Paulo Freire include *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2000), *Pedagogy of Freedom* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), *Pedagogy of the City* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1992), and many more.

not liberate, nor are they liberated: they oppress.”²⁸² Therefore, the structure of black leadership and white followership can create a needed emphasis on the centered leadership gifts, cultural experience, theological and biblical interpretation, communal practices, and overall experience of the black community away from the normative and destructive power of white supremacy.²⁸³

Given the emphasis on black leadership and cultural experience, it is important to remember 1 Peter. Diaspora Christians were those marginalized and, as Edwards implores, “Christians within the dominant culture have much to learn from diaspora Christians — those followers of Jesus whose perspective does not come from the top but has been shaped from the side or the bottom of society.”²⁸⁴ Similarly, he observes, Jesus was also on the margins of society and understood that experience.²⁸⁵ The biblical imperative to center the experience of the marginalized and implore the dominant to follow is stated clearly in Thurman’s words in *Jesus and the Disinherited*:

The basic fact is that Christianity as it was born in the mind of this Jewish teacher and thinker appears as a technique of survival for the oppressed. That it became, through the intervening years, a religion of the powerful and the dominant, used

²⁸² Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2000).

²⁸³ It is important to note as white followership is applied and expanded at The Sanctuary, to consider how the construct and of white followership applies to external community engagement, action, and relationships when black community leaders express different and even opposing sides to community issues. How might followership be applied in such a situation?

²⁸⁴ Edwards, *Might from the Margins*, 47.

²⁸⁵ Edwards, *Might from the Margins*, 48.

sometimes as an instrument of oppression, must not tempt us into believing that it was thus in the mind and life of Jesus.²⁸⁶

Thurman demonstrates it clearly: white followership is required toward an authentic pursuit of the Gospel and the particular work of racial justice. It should be clear by now why black leadership and the black experience are the particular emphases toward The Sanctuary's vision given the context in North Minneapolis and the church's founding vision.

Employing White Followership at The Sanctuary

If white congregants at The Sanctuary utilized these characteristics of white followership then, what would be different? Or how might they act, react, or process a situation without perpetuating white normativity? What might the outcome be in such a case? Here we look at previous examples of white dominance at The Sanctuary and theoretically apply white followership characteristics to observe what change might be possible.

First, in chapter two I shared anecdotally examples of white normativity at The Sanctuary. One of those examples included the infusion of white normativity in our children's ministry through white volunteers' racial bias toward black children in their classes. I have talked with multiple black parents who have shared a concern of white children's ministry volunteers exhibiting racial bias toward black children in the ministry, specifically white teachers unable to culturally relate to black children and interpreting

²⁸⁶ Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 18.

children's behaviors as defiance or reprimanding black boys at a higher rate than other white children.

Applying white followership to this situation would first challenge the white teacher to understand the normative lens of cultural behaviors and expectations they bring into the classroom. Applying white followership would include understanding the power the white teacher holds first as an adult in a position of power over children and also as a part of dominant culture. The realization of this position should act as information with which to understand a child and their cultural background and how it may be different from their own and, given their position of power as a teacher, consider their position before reprimanding the child without cultural understanding. The teacher could also employ curiosity with a child rather than resorting to applying their racial bias and assumption that hinders an exploration of the child's emotional state and reason for "acting out" in the first place. Finally, the white teacher, utilizing white followership, if confronted by a black parent questioning the teacher's actions would view the situation as an opportunity to grow instead and learn instead of failure and thus quit the ministry. These behaviors and actions employ white followership characteristics toward actionable change.

Second, in chapter three I shared examples of white congregants' reactions, questions, and perspectives after Floyd was killed. In it I shared that many felt paralyzed after his murder and during the riots. Perspectives shifted from justice toward fear as riots and looting began. An all-white suburban church assumed a need before asking and then turned our church into a distribution center overnight without conversation, consent, or

inquiry. Given the practices of white followership, white congregants could have embodied a curious posture regarding riots to understand the anger many people from the black community were feeling. Instead of assuming a need, the suburban church could have had a simple conversation with our senior pastor, asking what needs were present and how, if at all, they might partner in the relief work. They could have also offered long-standing volunteer support to help with the efforts they began to ensure Sanctuary pastors and staff members had the rest they required.

Finally, utilizing these self-reflection questions below with white congregants could prove to provide helpful growth toward the pursuit of racial reconciliation when white congregants need to reflect on their power in a given situation. They include:

- Have you considered how your reaction reinforces a white normative response of power versus a humbled and curious approach of white followership in the situation?
- How do you think your approach feels to the leadership of our senior pastor and elder board or staff?
- In your desire to point out a problem, how have you already envisioned how you will be a part of the solution, instead of demanding change only of others?
- Are you asking others to give up something to accommodate your comfort and perspective before you are willing to relinquish your comfort and power for another?
- Have you considered how your reaction as a white person is perceived/felt by our black senior pastor and/or congregants or neighbors?

Questions such as these are all part of changing normative perspectives, behaviors, and reactions toward actualizing our vision of greater justice and representation as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Overall, Christianity roots itself within the model of followership as disciples, stewardship, and service to others, otherwise, the “religious beliefs would not spread and the institution would collapse.”²⁸⁷ Blackshear herself stated these words in emphasizing the importance of understanding followership. But I would also add that not only would Christianity not spread without engaged followers, the mission of God would also be thwarted. Followers impact change and when followers do not realize their role and impact of their actions, then their relationship to leadership and even the vision of the organization are threatened. White people holding an uninformed understanding of their power and role in a multiethnic church is why white followership is so necessary at The Sanctuary, otherwise unconscious white hegemony will impede on the intended vision of the church. Because the mission of God is not for the powerful to continue to gain power and the disenfranchised to continue to suffer. Instead, God desires restoration of all things and thus, white followership is a part of that vision toward wholeness. But how might white followership be enacted at The Sanctuary? Utilizing Mezirow’s transformative adult learning theory, I plan to outline how to begin to concretely inaugurate white followership at The Sanctuary.

Transformative Adult Learning through Critical Self-Reflection Toward a Reification of White Followership

²⁸⁷ Blackshear, “The Followership Continuum,” 3.

One might assume adult learning is similar to any other form of learning — a new concept is introduced or curiosity is instilled and new knowledge is gained. But adult learning, particularly learning toward transformation, is more complex. Given that reality, Mezirow studied and wrote on the theory of transformative adult learning regarding deeper understanding and implementation of change. In Mezirow’s theory he distinguishes between three forms of adult learning. These include *instrumental learning*, *communicative learning*, and *emancipatory learning*. Instrumental learning is the “dynamics of learning to control and manipulate the environment.”²⁸⁸ Communicative learning involves “the dynamics of learning to understand others.”²⁸⁹ Finally, and most applicable to white followership, is emancipatory learning. According to Mezirow, emancipatory learning frees us in ways we did not realize we were bound by, allows people to see previously unseen realities that was once limiting, and then a deeper knowing develops. Mezirow describes emancipatory learning as follows:

[Emancipatory learning is] what impels us, through reflection, to identify and challenge distorted meaning perspectives. It is interest in the knowledge resulting from self-reflection, including interest in the way our history and biography have expressed themselves in the way we see ourselves, our assumptions about learning and the nature and use of knowledge, and our roles and social expectations and the repressed feelings that influence them. Emancipatory knowledge is knowledge gained through critical self-reflection, as distinct from the knowledge gained from our “technical” interest in the objective world or our “practical” interest in social relationships...The emancipation in emancipatory learning is emancipation from libidinal, linguistic, epistemic, institutional, or environmental forces that limit our options and our rational control over our lives but have been taken for granted or seen as beyond human control. These forces

²⁸⁸ Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1991), 73.

²⁸⁹ Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 73.

include the misconceptions, ideologies and psychological distortions in prior learning that produce or perpetuate unexamined relations of dependence.²⁹⁰

Mezirow demonstrates not only the process of emancipatory learning, but the imperative of it specifically regarding white followership as white people wake up to its reality. The emancipatory learning model is important in applying white followership because its premise is emancipation from beliefs, paradigms, knowledge, and systematic constructs that enforce and perpetuate white supremacy that results in racism and therefore preserves power. Self-reflection and action are required toward “perspective transformation” that leads to change.²⁹¹

It is necessary to understand the parts of critical self-reflection toward emancipatory learning that creates transformation. To understand Mezirow’s theory of critical self-reflection for the purposes of white followership at The Sanctuary, one must look to the words of professor of adult education Dr. Patricia Cranton.²⁹² Cranton has condensed and adapted Mezirow’s work to contemporary teaching and provides a clearer usage of the theory. Cranton, in *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning*, specifies three phases toward critical self-reflection. They include a *disorienting event*, *questioning assumptions and perspectives*, and *discourse, dialogue, and support* toward building a new epistemological scaffolding that leads to changed behavior and action.

²⁹⁰ Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 87.

²⁹¹ Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 94.

²⁹² Other relevant work by Patricia Cranton include *Authenticity in Teaching* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006).

These phases, it should be noted, are not rigid linear stages that people begin at and progress through. Instead, Cranton notes that “a person may cycle through some phases more than once, may skip some steps, or may experience aspects of the process in varying orders.”²⁹³ Though in saying that, there is intentionality behind the order of the phases, as people are more likely to begin a process of critical self-reflection because of a disorienting experience that provokes one’s engrained epistemology.

First, Cranton suggests the usefulness of exposing people to “social norms other than those to which we [previously subscribed to for the purpose of] a disorienting event.”²⁹⁴ Such an event can reveal the seemingly normal or unnoticed perspective or epistemology that one holds to and had no awareness of it. A prime example of such obliviousness is in chapter one when I recounted Hughes’ first edition of his book, *Myths America Lives By*. In that chapter I shared the story of him giving a speech about the first edition of his book and the prevalent myths that go unnoticed and uncritiqued by most Americans. After his presentation he sat down and a black colleague pointed out that he declined to note the most obvious and insidious American myth of all, that of white supremacy. After that disorienting experience, and the many questions and reflections that followed, Hughes rewrote his book and changed the entire premise to focus on white supremacy as the founding myth that America ascribes to. That is an example of a disorienting event and it can happen in almost any form or setting and rarely can be

²⁹³ Patricia Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning*, 3rd ed. (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC, 1994), 47.

²⁹⁴ Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning*, 49.

controlled or contrived by another person on behalf of the learner. It should be obvious the reasons why a disorienting event would prove advantageous for white people at The Sanctuary. Their self-awareness of white supremacy is predicated upon the dismantling of it; if white people remain unaware of white supremacy and their power, then change cannot happen at the rate required. That is not to say the advocacy work of people of color goes unnoticed or without advancement, but it makes the change more arduous without white people's consciousness of and attentiveness to the problem.

In imagining implementing a disorienting event or experience at The Sanctuary toward white followership, many avenues are possible. In particular, however, utilizing already-developed modes for awareness will prove most successful for an exercise in creating a disorienting experience. Those modes that already exist at The Sanctuary include: the preached word, content of our Membership Matters class, deliberate Life Groups, focused Bible studies, intentional curricula for our children and youth, and purposeful conversations in the midst of societal and political events in our community, such as community conversations after an instance of police brutality in our neighborhood or city. The above modes are not something new for The Sanctuary, but Cranton's work provides a framework to more intentionally challenge white congregants in critical self-reflection. Also, simply introducing the topic of white followership already for congregants has proved to provide a disorienting experience as they grapple with the concept and intent. I believe in offering more spaces to talk about and teach the content above will provide a disorienting space that can lead to critical self-reflection.

Second, Cranton states that central to Mezirow's theory of transformative learning is "questioning assumptions and perspectives."²⁹⁵ Questioning assumptions and perspectives is the process where "people become aware of assumptions, make them explicit, consider the sources of the assumptions and the consequences of holding them, and question their validity."²⁹⁶ Such questioning is a necessary step. Unfortunately, far too often white people become aware, through a disorienting event of the pervasiveness of white supremacy, but upon facing that their fragility overwhelms them and they fail to continue along into the phase of interrogating their assumptions, experiences, perceptions, and power. After all, Cranton notes that "becoming aware of assumptions or the habits of mind that consist of a web of related assumptions is difficult."²⁹⁷ It takes the characteristics of white followership outlined above. So, questioning assumptions and perspectives is a crucial phase in helping white congregants continue on in the emancipatory learning process to admit sin and fault, interrogate white supremacist fidelities, and chart a way forward. Helpful in the stage is the usage of *questioning*.²⁹⁸ The white congregant needs questions that can help them "figure out things for

²⁹⁵ Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning*, 50.

²⁹⁶ Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning*, 50.

²⁹⁷ Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning*, 50.

²⁹⁸ Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning*, 107.

themselves” [and thus develop] a “constructive process” for continued transformative learning.²⁹⁹

Applying the phase of questioning assumptions and perspective at The Sanctuary, again, will come in multiple forms. While the questioning phase will happen in the aforementioned spaces that already exist at The Sanctuary, in particular the development of core classes that focus on the distinct values at The Sanctuary would prove necessary. In imagining a suite of core classes at Sanctuary, it would allow leadership to focus on areas of distinction for our church. In thinking about these classes, I imagine the following: the particularities of urban ministry, the biblical imperative and facets of a multiethnic church, leadership development, and white followership, among others. Some of these core classes have been offered in the past at The Sanctuary, some of these topics are currently being developed, and some, including the white followership course, are yet to be created.³⁰⁰ Building a class grounded in the characteristics above will be a major course of action toward ensuring change at The Sanctuary. Overall, providing these core classes that congregants are encouraged to participate in could offer the spaces necessary to engage in the phase of questioning one’s assumptions and perspectives. In particular, since many white congregants at The Sanctuary grew up in smaller, homogenous towns, these classes would provide helpful spaces to process their assumptions and perspectives. Thus, these core classes would certainly aid in greater critical self-reflection.

²⁹⁹ Patricia Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning*, 107. See Appendix A for specific reflection questions.

³⁰⁰ See Appendix B for a working syllabus of the White Followership Core Class.

Third, Cranton provides a final phase toward critical self-reflection for the purpose of transformative learning through *discourse, dialogue, and support* toward building a new scaffolding of awareness and action.³⁰¹ In the third phase, relationships, and in particular relational accountability, are necessary. The particular discourse Mezirow and Cranton are describing includes, “the assessment of beliefs, feelings, and values,” which Mezirow saw as vital to transformative learning, and a role for both the educator as well as the learner’s community.³⁰² The third phase is purposefully pointedly communal because, as Cranton observes, “people play a role in questioning and challenging, helping us to unearth our hidden assumptions and question their validity.... Others can assist us in not only articulating our own perspectives but also seeing alternatives.”³⁰³

Employing the third phase, given its relational imperative, seems most applicable in the core class on white followership and as a Life Group (Life Groups are The Sanctuary’s small group ministry) setting where relationships and relational accountability are central. I see implementing phase three in stages, however. Given that white people are socialized in white supremacy, one facet of that socialization is individuality. The over-emphasis on individuality will tempt some white congregants into thinking that their process toward understanding and the work of white followership can be done separately, but it is simply untrue. Phase three of discourse, dialogue, and

³⁰¹ Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning*, 51.

³⁰² Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning*, 51.

³⁰³ Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning*, 51-52.

support is relational and predicated on accountability, and likely will be the hardest for many white congregants at The Sanctuary. It will take more than simply attending church services and nodding in agreement for any change to occur.

Therefore, the stages I suggest would first begin in the Membership Matters class where many white congregants are finding ways to learn more about The Sanctuary, our story, our denomination, and beliefs. Currently Membership Matters does not include critical examination of our distinct values, such as what it means to be an urban and multiethnic church. I propose particular spaces in our Membership Matter class for white congregants and congregants of color to discuss what racial implications are involved in being a part of a church like The Sanctuary. The conversation will be very different between the two groups, which is why it is necessary. To continue such opportunities phase three requires, I also propose creating Life Groups and a core class around white followership to help white congregants gain the necessary tools, understanding, and awareness that leads to actionable change and not simply epistemological awareness. Phase three, which requires deeper relationality and community, again may prove to be the most difficult at The Sanctuary.

While Mezirow's methodology of transformative adult learning is both compelling and applicable for The Sanctuary there is one critique to name and observe as white followership and these stages are implemented and assessed. Mezirow's methodology addresses largely epistemological transformation. It describes a moment of awareness and changed insight as a result. But it will be important for The Sanctuary to observe whether or not Mezirow's methodology addresses action-based transformation

that is predicated upon the success of white followership in the first place. The possible downside of Mezirow's overemphasis on epistemological transformation and not as much emphasis on action-based transformation is significant to name and observe as the white followership construct is implemented. The problem of white supremacy in multiethnic churches reaches far beyond simply acknowledging there is a problem — though that is a worthy first step. Instead, the standard must be set much higher for true transformation to occur and one approach alone will not be sufficient.

Conclusion

Overall, implementing white followership is multi-faceted. There will not be one class, a single sermon series, or particular experience that will yield the necessary results. However, in using Mezirow and Cranton's theory and phases, it creates a more tangibly-rich imaginative soil for white followership to be planted, nurtured, produced, and propagated throughout the congregation. I also believe it is not my role alone to dictate exactly how the construct of white followership is enacted and instead I need to do the necessary work to then gather and ignite a communal imagination toward implementation and transformative change.

Above, I have detailed the concept of white followership both as a theory and actionable characteristic white congregants can employ as one remedy among many for white normativity at The Sanctuary. I utilized business literature to elucidate the misconceptions of followership and provided a more accurate depiction of followership. In that I utilized Blackshear's work in particular through her definition of an exemplary follower, which proved a helpful grounding guide in construction white followership at

The Sanctuary. I further defined white followership, its features and implementations at The Sanctuary. In describing its features, I provided eight actionable characteristics of white followership for white congregants at The Sanctuary. I then imagined how these characteristics might be utilized by white people through taking anecdotal examples of white normativity at The Sanctuary and applying white followership to those examples. Finally, I utilized Mezirow's theory of transformative adult learning as a guide to implementing white followership in specific ways at The Sanctuary. Mezirow's theory provided a clear implementation pathway of white followership at The Sanctuary.

This chapter showed that white followership is a construct that proves to provide one of many necessary steps in bridging the gap from the reality of white hegemony toward the vision of black-centered leadership and experience at The Sanctuary. If implemented well and with commitment from white congregants at The Sanctuary, the construct of white followership has the potential to be exemplars of required systemic change in the multiethnic church and in U.S. society. Measuring if such change is possible is the final task in the next chapter.

PART 4: MEASURING CHANGE

CHAPTER 5

IMPLEMENTING PRAXIS, MEASURING AUTHENTIC CHANGE

“The oppressor is solidary with the oppressed only when he stops regarding the oppressed as an abstract category and sees them as persons who have been unjustly dealt with, deprived of their voice, cheated in the sale of their labor — when he stops making pious, sentimental, and individualistic gestures and risks an act of love. True solidarity is found only in the plentitude of this act of love, in its existentiality, in its praxis. To affirm that men and women are persons and as persons should be free, and yet to do nothing tangible to make this affirmation a reality, is a farce.”

—Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*³⁰⁴

As described in chapter four, the concept of “white followership” in my project bridges the gap from the reality of white hegemony toward the vision of black-centered leadership and experience at The Sanctuary. It is a theoretical construct with actionable, practical characteristics. The construct of white followership provides the potential for The Sanctuary to reach its intended vision to truly be an urban, multiethnic church seeking to reconcile people to God and one another. Simply proposing and explaining the construct in the previous chapter is not enough. For white followership to be successful it must be based in true praxis toward real transformation. In the words from Freire above, affirming a belief toward liberation is not enough; communal action is required. Therefore, in the remaining chapter, I seek to address how I will measure substantive change toward not only white followership, but also a more liberated form of black-centered leadership and experience at The Sanctuary.

³⁰⁴ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 50.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, there is not one way to apply white followership at The Sanctuary. Instead, it is a multifaceted approach toward transformation. Likewise, measuring change will also take a multifaceted approach. I seek to measure if change takes place in a three-step approach. First, by observing initially if resistance arises from white congregants as power is addressed and the status quo is more deeply disrupted. Second, I will utilize the Critical Participatory Action Research³⁰⁵ methodology in a modified format specifically in the white followership core class to communally set goals toward action and then measure change. Third, I will collect congregational and pastoral stories and anecdotes as a form of autoethnography at different stages to understand how change is occurring and to use it as a form of testimony toward God's intended vision for The Sanctuary. Storytelling at The Sanctuary is already an important spiritual practice at The Sanctuary, so autoethnography will integrate contextual ways to measure and mark transformation.

Witnessing Resistance as a Sign of Dismantling the Status Quo

One of the core methodologies in the previous chapter for helping white congregants at The Sanctuary understand the necessity for white followership was grounded in emancipatory learning. Emancipatory learning as a methodology seeks to not only bring about awareness, but to build a new scaffolding of reality as white congregants understand how their power as white people obstructs the vision of The Sanctuary. To do such a thing sounds wonderful on paper, but in reality, can be quite difficult,

³⁰⁵ Herein referred to as CPAR.

uncomfortable, and an arduous process. Therefore, one can assume that the emancipatory process will not come about without tension for all and even resistance from some.

Edwards, The Sanctuary's former senior pastor, states it well when he undeniably says, "White Christians tend toward preserving the status quo, which serves to protect their worldview, their way of life, and their privileged position."³⁰⁶ White peoples' need for preservation was seen in chapter one when Trump gained such approval among white evangelicals, despite his debauched morals, because of the desire for what once was in the way of unquestionable power. Seeking preservation, while not as overt and supported in a different context, is likely to be ignited for white congregants at The Sanctuary — not because they are not interested in change or deny racism, but simply because dismantling systems, cultural norms, and behaviors associated with power is difficult. Gloria Steinem,³⁰⁷ American feminist, activist, and writer states the likely conundrum for most white Sanctuary congregants when she entitled her 2019 book, "The truth will set you free, but first it will piss you off."³⁰⁸ While her comments may seem brazen, they are true. I believe that white congregants at The Sanctuary understand the liberatory potential of dismantling racism, particularly within our own church, and yet shifting white

³⁰⁶ Edwards, *Might from the Margins*, 6.

³⁰⁷ Other relevant works by Gloria Steinem include *Revolution from Within* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company, 1993), *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions* (London: Picador, 2019), *Moving Beyond Words* (New York: Touchstone, 1995).

³⁰⁸ Gloria Steinem, *The Truth Will Set You Free, But First It Will Piss You Off!* (New York: Random House, 2019).

normativity, questioning bias, and yielding power is likely to stimulate deep, uncomfortable emotions.

Therefore, the first way I seek to measure if change is happening at The Sanctuary is to observe how resistance increases as a result of movement toward change. Any change, even if it is in fact positive, is challenging and requires grit. Dr. Chris Schlauch,³⁰⁹ Associate Professor of Pastoral Psychology and Psychology of Religion at Boston University's School of Theology, agrees with peoples' resistance to change when he says, "Change involves understanding why we are the way we are, and that understanding involves exploring the past, and some of what is painful in the past. But we want to protect ourselves from re-experiencing pain. So we limit our exploration, and our change."³¹⁰ Limiting exploration and deferring change are mechanisms of resistance, particularly resistance to the changing status quo. In the context of The Sanctuary, as white people understand more deeply their implicit power within our church, their participation of white normativity, and begin the process of white followership and yielding power, it will likely become painful and uncomfortable — a disorienting event, like Cranton outlines as part of the process of transformative learning — and thus, resistance is likely from some congregants.³¹¹

³⁰⁹ Other relevant work by Chris Schlauch include *Faithful Companionship* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995).

³¹⁰ Jeffrey Slater, "Restoring Hope in the Present for Congregations in the Context of Prolonged Numerical Decline" (DMin project thesis, Boston University School of Theology, 2019), 113.

³¹¹ Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning*, 47.

The particularities of resistance within white culture, however, will likely happen in passive forms. Instead of overt argument or disagreement, it may instead include participants missing classes, dropping out before the course is complete, writing complaints to the elder board instead of addressing the instructors, looking for black congregants who might agree with their displeasure of the topic, and so on. As white followership is introduced, developed, and implemented these initial passive forms of resistance will be instructive for me and other leaders in gauging if disruption to the status quo at The Sanctuary is happening. Resistance is a preliminary visible measurement of change, but is not where the process of change ends. Instead, deeper and substantive change toward the actual goal of racial justice requires a more robust approach. Therefore, the second measurement of assessing change will be utilizing the Critical Participatory Action Research.³¹²

Collaborative Action Toward Liberatory Outcomes

The CPAR is a form of qualitative research that is designed for emancipatory purposes through collective means. CPAR methodology encompasses Freire's words as it is a form of research to measure change toward emancipatory ends utilizing an engaged community in collective action. In thinking about a way to measure change I do not simply want to perpetuate oppressive hierarchies that would situate me or another instructor as the power-holder of action and change, instead it must be shared. CPAR will also allow white congregants to practice the very behaviors of followership in a more

³¹² Stephen Kemmis, Robin McTaggart, and Rhonda Nixon, *The Action Research Planner: Doing Critical Participatory Action Research* (New York: Springer Publishing, 2016).

communal way instead of perpetuating individualistic measures. CPAR also is designed as a methodology of praxis; it is situated upon actionable steps toward measured change.³¹³ Therefore, CPAR will be a useful, participatory, actionable methodology for measuring if change happens through white followership at The Sanctuary.

While CPAR is a developed construct, for the purposes of utilizing it at The Sanctuary apart from an academic institution, its simplified approach will be most beneficial for the purposes and context of The Sanctuary. Good and thorough work has been done on the use of CPAR in research, but its application can be simply stated as a cyclical process toward emancipatory outcomes comprised of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting.³¹⁴ CPARs four-step liberatory approach is communal in character and adaptable in form and thus will work well at The Sanctuary. It allows for a decentralized role of a researcher. In the context of The Sanctuary, it would decentralize the role of the pastor or instructor of the white followership core class in particular, and employ a communal approach. The four parts of CPAR designate it as a tool focused upon the participants' "understanding of the problem being studied."³¹⁵ Thus, it is not only a tool to chart out and measure change, but the process itself is inherently bent on transformative learning and reflection. Such an emphasis on transformation pairs well with Meizerow's theory of transformative adult learning, which is an approach that has

³¹³ Kyle Ashlee, "Construction, Deconstructing, and Reconstructing Whiteness" (PhD diss., The Graduate School of Miami University, 2019), 51.

³¹⁴ Ashlee, "Construction, Deconstructing, and Reconstructing Whiteness," 42.

³¹⁵ Ashlee, "Construction, Deconstructing, and Reconstructing Whiteness," 52.

also already proven effective particularly as white people utilize it toward emancipatory and transformational learning. In particular, Dr. Kyle Ashlee, researcher, instructor, writer, and congregant at The Sanctuary, has utilized the CPAR approach in his own study on whiteness in higher education for helping white students understand race. In his research utilizing CPAR, it was proven effective as a means toward transformative change in a similar context and topic. Utilizing CPAR as an approach and from his experience with it also provides a helpful initial guide in measuring change at The Sanctuary.

In Ashlee's usage of CPAR, he condenses CPAR's approach in a helpful way, which I will draw upon for The Sanctuary's usage. Utilizing Ashlee's condensed usage of CPAR, these four aspects invite white followers at The Sanctuary:

1. "to develop a *plan* of action to improve what is already happening;
2. to *act* to implement the plan;
3. to *observe* the effects of action in the context in which it occurs;
4. to *reflect* on these effects as a basis for further planning, subsequent action and on, through a succession of cycles."³¹⁶

The first aspect of CPAR is to develop a plan. Chapter four already outlined the initial plan of implementing white followership at The Sanctuary. What is helpful about CPAR's methodology is it allows the plan to continually adapt to the needs of the church. While the plan outlined in chapter four may prove initially helpful, because CPAR is a cyclical process, it allows for the plan to shift as members see other ways in which to

³¹⁶ Ashlee, "Construction, Deconstructing, and Reconstructing Whiteness," 52.

practice white followership. CPAR allows for adaptation and collective implementation. But the remaining three aspects of CPAR is what will allow The Sanctuary to measure if change is taking place or not.

To act, observe, and reflect are the active process of noticing change. As participants act to implement white followership, it is through observation and reflection that will reveal the status of change. As congregants engaged in the white followership core class begin to shift their perspective of power and engagement at The Sanctuary, and take action steps toward change, then class participants will engage in a process of observation and reflection. I plan to implement observation and reflection throughout the white followership course. Such observation and reflection will happen in each class session through discussion, questions, and reflection assignments throughout the course. At the end of the course before the conclusion of the class, participants will engage in a time of intentional observation, reflection, and planning. Participants will be asked to share observations of change in their own life as well as instances at church. They will be asked to observe what change is still needed and then provide both an individual and collective action plan to continue the CPAR cycle. Doing so will allow for action steps for participants to continue once the course is complete, but will also provide actionable steps toward revising the course itself to address deeper change at The Sanctuary. The CPAR methodology provides both an individual and collective measurement of change.

Bearing Witness to Transformation Through Autoethnography

Storytelling is a common spiritual practice at The Sanctuary. In recounting God's faithfulness and power, leaders and congregants at The Sanctuary have participated in

storytelling as a means of God’s presence and provision. It is a form of bearing witness to transformation in the congregation. As such, storytelling in some form must be utilized to measure and celebrate God’s transformation through white followership at The Sanctuary.

To best utilize storytelling, I seek to gather congregational and pastoral stories as a process of autoethnography. Autoethnography is a method of qualitative research that centers the stories and perspectives of people in nuanced ways and arose as a response to colonialism and the need for diversification of epistemology.³¹⁷ “Autoethnographic stories are artistic and analytic demonstrations of how we come to know, name, and interpret personal and cultural experience.”³¹⁸ Autoethnography is accomplished by allowing participants to engage in self-reflective storytelling and then meaning-making. “Autoethnographics begin with the thoughts, feelings, identities, and experiences that make us uncertain — knocking us for sense-making loops — and that make us questions, reconsider, and reorder our understandings of ourselves, others and our worlds.”³¹⁹

Therefore, I will utilize the methodology of autoethnographies with both white congregants and our senior pastor to measure if change happens at The Sanctuary. For white congregants participating in the white followership core class, I will provide autoethnographic questions before and after the core class to gain anecdotal, self-

³¹⁷ Tony E. Adams, Stacy Holman Jones, and Carolyn Ellis, *Autoethnography: Understanding Qualitative Research* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 21.

³¹⁸ Adams, Holman Jones, and Ellis, *Autoethnography*, 1.

³¹⁹ Adams, Holman Jones, and Ellis, *Autoethnography*, 47.

reflective analysis and meaning-making stories that provide anecdotal evidence regarding transformation at The Sanctuary in the area of white dominance and normativity. An outline of these questions can be found in Appendix C. Then I will also provide autoethnographic self-reflective questions for the senior pastor every six months for two years. I seek the particular perspective of the senior pastor because up until now, one clear weakness of the above methodologies in measuring change queries and observes white people involved in the core class and does not include the voice of the senior pastor. Therefore, the final method in measuring change through autoethnographic stories will help me understand if the construct of white followership is a praxis of transformation at The Sanctuary. I seek specifically to understand if there are gains toward our vision as a result of white followership from his perspective. I will do that by assessing if he feels supported and some level of strain is decreased, if he feels his leadership and the greater experience of black congregants are more centered than previously, and how white congregants are communicating with him. An outline of these questions can be found in Appendix D. In collecting these pastoral autoethnographic stories, I will be able to assess more fully if transformation is taking place through greater white followership and deeper black-led priorities at The Sanctuary.

Conclusion

For change to happen at The Sanctuary, its methodology must be active and substantive, as Freire states. The process of evaluating change must also support outcomes of greater justice. The above outlines a strong process to measure change at The Sanctuary while also providing flexible means to assess and reassess plans and

action. Those measurements are three-fold: 1) observe if white congregants exhibit resistance to change as the status quo is challenged and disrupted; 2) utilize CPAR as a communal way to set actionable goals, measure progress, and continue to modify an active plan of followership; 3) employ autoethnographic stories of white congregants included before and after the white followership core class and the senior pastor at regular intervals. Utilizing such a process provides a solid foundation for The Sanctuary to grow as a more just multiethnic church and it also provides a malleable framework for other multiethnic churches to imagine and utilize in their own context. Transformation from the legacy of white supremacy, through white followership toward black-centered leadership and experience, is possible in the American Church's continued work to God's vision of the kingdom here on earth of racial justice.

EPILOGUE

White supremacy cannot be classified only as KKK rallies and overt racist actions against people of color in America. Every day, harmful, widespread white supremacy is much more concealed — at least it is obscured to most white people given the power and normative dominance they hold in the United States. The work of dismantling racial injustice is not as simple as cultivating diversity and engaging in cross-racial friendships. Those may be aspects of it, but the work is much more covert, intentional, and strenuous. The recent multiethnic movement has sought to address the problem of racism through its inception and vision. These multiethnic churches, including The Sanctuary, have organized themselves almost completely around the vision of eradicating racism by expressing the link of justice to the Christian mission. Yet, racism still exists in the United States and multiethnic churches still perpetuate inequalities. Therefore, a new approach and an intentional shift of power is necessary. White followership, as it seeks to center the voices and leadership of people of color, is one requisite piece in the continued work toward justice. It is a construct that shifts power, requires white people to recognize the normative dominance they have even in a multiethnic church, it provides tangible actions in yielding control, and affords a new opportunity to a role and relationship in the multiethnic church necessary toward the vision of racial justice. White followership has the potential to push the movement of multiethnic churches forward, instead of staying stagnant in a place of shallowness and false equality. White congregants cannot ignore their power once they enter the doors of a multiethnic church; they must recognize it,

yield it, and actively follow. Without such a shift, the subtle problematic power of white supremacy perpetuates.

The summation of this project has highlighted the particular problem of white supremacy broadly in the United States and in the white American church. It has also stated the particularities of white supremacy in multiethnic churches. A clear outline has been detailed of the precise problems that The Sanctuary faces as it seeks to realize its vision of racial justice. The ideal outcome of being a black-led and black-centered urban, multiethnic church has been imagined, and a probable solution of white followership has been submitted. Much has been said about the need for the particular structure of black-led leadership and black-centered experience at The Sanctuary through both contextual and biblical reasoning. Rather than being stuck in the fragility of white guilt and inaction, many practical action steps have been provided for white congregants toward growth and change. Given the focus and particular examples provided in this project, one may reach the conclusion that multiethnic churches, and The Sanctuary in particular, are simply fraught with problems and not positioned with possibilities. Quite the contrary, this project proves the work and vision of the multiethnic church is not in vain and great movement lies ahead. One simply needs to imagine furthering the work of justice toward deeper realization to materialize stronger pathways ahead. White followership is one such viable pathway ahead. The Sanctuary is positioned well to lead such innovative transformation. Innovative transformation is crucial because without it, the multiethnic church will continue to perpetuate the exact sins it seeks to dismantle and the work toward God's full restoration will be left incomplete. Imagining new strides forward,

such as white followership, is integral to achieving God's vision of justice and wholeness.

White followership, however, is not the summation of the solution. As stated already, this project detailed the scope of white followership given my leadership role and racial identity; it is the most authentic offering I can provide as I seek to be a leader of transformative change. Therefore, the gaps of this project first include its scope. This project assumes a great deal about the lead pastor and other leaders of color shaping influence within the congregation. Thus, there is much to be explored about the necessity of the pastor's health as a leader, his/her ability to cultivate an authentic multiethnic church, and skill in leading justice-centered change.

The scope of this project also was unable to develop a pathway toward empowering congregants of color to lead in particular and intentional ways at The Sanctuary, as it seeks to center their experience. However, The Sanctuary currently is developing a leadership development pathway that would address the particular leadership and voice of congregants of color while also helping white congregants understand the particularities of white followership.

Given the context of The Sanctuary and its particular vision of being a black-led and black-centered urban, multiethnic church also assumes a gap for churches in a different context. This project focused on the particular contextual analysis of The Sanctuary and therefore leaves room for good engagement, imagination, and development for multiethnic churches in different context.

Another gap within this project is the portrayal of the many ways in which white congregants at The Sanctuary continue to hold places of leadership while simultaneously seeking to follow and submit to its senior pastor. White followership, as stated in chapter four, is not a blunt delineation that relegates all people of color as leaders and white people as passive followers. It is instead a posture and positionality shift many white congregants must undertake in understanding their role and relationship in the work of gospel-centered justice.

Finally, the scope of this project focused on white followership as a pedagogical approach, institutional strategy, and ecclesial culture for The Sanctuary. The project did not focus on the corporate worship experience, external evangelistic strategies, or community action and engagement. Further attention to those considerations as the white followership pathway progresses will be pivotal in ensuring white followership practices are infused at The Sanctuary. A first step in incorporating and considering worship, evangelism, and community action could include dialogue with the worship design team and neighboring and outreach team with senior leadership to consider white followership's application.

While there are marked gaps and opportunities for further exploration, white followership is an essential and innovative feature in the future work of justice-centered multiethnic churches. The construct provides a framing yet to be established and developed in such a form and its practices prove indispensable in further progress. Passive presence or dominating exploitations are no longer roles white congregants can assume given the call of white followership. The spotlight must shift from only educating

white people of their ignorance's and also elevate an expectation to their involvement in the multiethnic church.

“Lord, raise up a standard!” This is a frequent prayer of one of our elders, Rev. Rosemary Klass. Her prayer and wisdom encapsulates the call of white congregants at The Sanctuary in our collective action toward justice through the challenge to elevate the expectations of what it means to be a dominant person in U.S. society and address that accordingly as a Christ follower. To reach the transformative potential The Sanctuary envisions as a church, white congregants must heed the call to ignite a holy imagination and intentionally embody the practices of white followership. Failing to seek white followership will result in a blockage of justice. Therefore, white followership is not only relevant to The Sanctuary, but is malleable enough to be contextualized to other contexts and relevant for all multiethnic churches. White followership is a call for all multiethnic churches to follow suit and imagine the possibilities when the marginalized are centered and the dominant yield in necessary submission through active followership.

APPENDIX A: REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR QUESTIONING ASSUMPTIONS AND PERSPECTIVES TOWARD CONTINUED TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

In the continued work of dismantling white supremacy, especially from one's own person, white congregants at The Sanctuary will need to shift from assumptive thinking to a posture of curiosity and practice of interrogation. A posture of curiosity and a practice of interrogation will begin to challenge white congregants to hold loosely their normative assumptions within a multiethnic church, and instead learn through curiosity and self-reflection. The questions below serve as examples white congregants can utilize on their journey of white followership.

1. As a white congregant at The Sanctuary, what questions might I need to ask myself to uncover my assumptions?
2. What assumptions about white normative church practices do I bring to The Sanctuary?
3. What power do I bring to The Sanctuary as a white person?
4. How have I perpetuated that power in church unknowingly?
5. When the lead pastor or a congregant of color states something I do not agree with, is my initial reaction curiosity or defensiveness?
6. How is The Sanctuary different from my previous church experiences? How do those differences relate to The Sanctuary's multiethnic identity?
7. How does my participation at The Sanctuary further my commitment to anti-racism work?
8. Have I considered how I might actively yield my white dominant power as a congregant at The Sanctuary?
9. How might I embody a posture of curiosity that propels deeper learning instead of an assumptive posture?
10. How do I feel about change?
11. When I identify a problem I see needs fixing at The Sanctuary, how do I actively seek to be a part of the solution?

APPENDIX B: WHITE FOLLOWERSHIP CORE CLASS SYLLABUS

The syllabus below provides an example of the core classes entitled *White Followership* at The Sanctuary. This course is meant for white congregants at The Sanctuary toward introducing, employing characteristics and behaviors of, and making practical steps toward white followership.

White Followership

Instructor(s): Pastor Rose Lee-Norman and other Guest Instructors
Spring 2021
Sanctuary Covenant Church Core Class
rose@sanctuarycov.org

Class Sessions: Wednesday Night Life Groups, Spring session from 6:30pm-8:00pm
Location: The Sanctuary Covenant Church – The Gathering Place – 2018 Aldrich Ave N

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

White Followership is a part of The Sanctuary's Core Class offerings. White Followership will explore the foundations of the prevalent problem of white dominant power at work in evangelical multiethnic churches like The Sanctuary. As a remedy to such a problem, this core class will give a historical and contextual look at black-centered leadership and experience at The Sanctuary, given its context in North Minneapolis. Participants will then learn about the construct and practices of White Followership, which seek to bridge the gap between the problem of white dominance and the vision of black-led and black-centered multiethnic ministry toward racial justice at The Sanctuary. The core class features multiple instructors, participatory sessions, required work between sessions, and a process for charting an action-based plan forward. Participants will gain effective skills, perspective shifts, and a vision of hope for the lifelong anti-racism work required of white congregants at The Sanctuary. Come ready to learn, discuss, plan, implement and act – White Followership is anything but passive!

Learning Outcomes:

1. further understanding of white supremacy in the United States and the American evangelical multiethnic church movement, power and race in evangelical multiethnic churches like The Sanctuary. The imperative of black leadership at The Sanctuary, and the construct and practices of White Followership;
2. enhanced competencies in anti-racism work particular to white congregants at The Sanctuary;
3. capacity to reflect upon and articulate one's own self-reflective journey toward anti-racism;
4. integration of the biblical and theological premises for White Followership;
5. practices that build capacity, resilience, and action toward anti-racism through White Followership practices.

Core Class Expectations:

1. Class participation: come ready to learn, participate, and grow
2. Completion of introductory autoethnographic reflection questions
3. Required readings and resource assignments in between class sessions
4. Completion of concluding autoethnographic reflection questions

Class Sessions:

Wednesday, March 3: Introduction to White Supremacy in the United States and Eurocentric Christianity and the Emergence of the Evangelical Multiethnic Church as a Response to the Sin of Racism

Readings and Resources:

Introductory autoethnographic reflection questions

How to be Anti-Racist by Ibram X. Kendi, chapter 1

The Fire Next Time by James Baldwin, pages 1-11

White Followership by Rev. Dr. Rose Lee-Norman, chapter 1

Wednesday, March 10: Framing the Power of Whiteness in the United States and the Multiethnic Church

Readings and Resources:

Race and Power Structures in Churches by Dr. Korie Little Edwards video link:

<https://sociology.osu.edu/KorieEdwards>

I Bring the Voices of My People by Dr. Chanequa Walker-Barnes, chapter 1

Wednesday, March 17: The Imperative of Leadership from the Margins at The Sanctuary

Readings and Resources:

Cornerstone TPT video on North Minneapolis

Might from the Margins by Rev. Dr. Dennis Edwards, chapters 1-3

Dr. Korie Little Edwards' article: <https://faithfullymagazine.com/korie-little-edwards-multiracial-churches/>

Wednesday, March 24: The Biblical and Theological Premises for White Followership

Readings and Resources:

Strangers to Family by Rev. Dr. Shively Smith, chapter 1

“Seven Theological Shifts toward White Followership” by Pastor Rose Lee-Norman

Wednesday, March 31: White Followership: What It Is and Is Not and How Might We Practice It as a Church

Readings and Resources:

Followership by Barbara Kellerman, introduction and chapter 1

White Followership chapter 4 sections and “White Followership” construct by Pastor Rose Lee-Norman

Wednesday, April 7: White Followership Continued

Readings and Resources:

“White Followership” construct by Pastor Rose Lee-Norman

Wednesday, April 14: Assessing Change, Mapping Action, and Concluding Stories

Readings and Resources:

Concluding autoethnographic reflection questions

Core Class Readings and Resources:

Introductory and concluding autoethnographic reflection questions will be provided in class; a supplementary bibliography will be provided at the first session.

Baldwin, James. *The Fire Next Time*. New York, NY: Vintage International, reprinted in 1993.

Cornerstones: A History of North Minneapolis. Co-produced with the University of Minnesota and Urban Research and Outreach Engagement Center. TPT Twin Cities PBS, November 13, 2011.

Edwards, Dennis R. *Might from the Margins: The Gospel’s Power to Turn the Tables on Injustice*. Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2020.

Edwards, Korie Little. “Multiracial Churches Don’t Challenge Racism Until They Challenge White Supremacy.” *Faithfully Magazine*, <https://faithfullymagazine.com/korie-little-edwards-multiracial-churches/>, 2020.

Edwards, Korie Little. “Race and Power Structures in Churches.” The Ohio State University. <https://sociology.osu.edu/KorieEdwards>.

Kellerman, Barbara. *Followership: How Followers are Creating Change and Changing Leaders*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2008.

Kendi, Ibram X. *How to be Anti-Racist*. New York, NY: One World, 2019.

Lee-Norman, Rose. *White Followership*. DMin diss., School of Theology, Boston University, 2021.

Smith, Shively T. J. *Strangers to Family: Diaspora and 1 Peter’s Invention of God’s Household*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016.

Walker-Barnes, Chanequa. *I Bring the Voices of My People*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019.

APPENDIX C: AUTOETHNOGRAPHY REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR WHITE CONGREGANTS

The following questions will be used to measure change per chapter five. The first set of questions will be provided to white congregants at the start of the core class *White Followership*. These answers will provide initial information of congregants' responses and self-reflections. The second set of questions will be provided to white congregants at the end of the core class. The introductory and concluding responses will measure change experienced from the core class *White Followership*.

Introductory Questions:

1. Consider the question, "Who am I?" Take time to describe yourself however you desire.
2. In considering a description of yourself, what values are most important to your identity?
3. How does your described identity include your race as a white person?
4. Describe American values.
5. Describe a recent cultural experience of whiteness you can remember.
6. When was the last time you thought about something from your white normative culture in the course of your week? What was happening and why did you think about it?
7. When have you noticed your whiteness at The Sanctuary?
8. Share a story of a moment from your involvement at The Sanctuary where you noticed white dominance happening at church.

Concluding Questions:

1. After taking *White Followership*, how would you answer the question, "Who am I?"
2. What values are most important to your identity?
3. How do you understand your experience as white?
4. Describe American values.
5. Describe a recent cultural experience of whiteness you can remember.
6. When was the last time you thought about something from your white normative culture in the course of your week? What was happening and why did you think about it?
7. How do you notice your whiteness now at The Sanctuary as a result of this core class?
8. Share a story of a moment since the core class concluded that represents an experience where you noticed white dominance at The Sanctuary that you would have not noticed before this core class.

APPENDIX D: AUTOETHNOGRAHY REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR LEAD PASTOR

The following questions will be used to measure change per chapter five. The first set of questions will be provided to the lead pastor at The Sanctuary. These answers will provide initial information of the lead pastors' perspective and experience. The second set of questions will be provided to the lead pastor at regularly defined intervals. The introductory and concluding responses will measure change experienced from the perspective and experience of the lead pastor at The Sanctuary.

Introductory Questions:

1. How does your role as senior pastor of an evangelical, urban, multiethnic church contribute to your stress level?
2. Describe 3 prominent examples of white dominance at The Sanctuary.
3. Describe 3 subtle examples of white dominance at The Sanctuary.
4. Describe a time as senior pastor when you experienced a moment in ministry when your leadership and power were respected and followed at The Sanctuary. How did that feel?
5. What do you discern are our church's next step toward our distinctive of being a black-led, black-centered urban, multiethnic church?

Continuing Questions:

1. What current stressors are you carrying as senior pastor of The Sanctuary?
2. Describe 3 prominent examples of white dominance at The Sanctuary. Are they similar or different since the last interview?
3. Describe 3 subtle examples of white dominance at The Sanctuary. Are they similar or different since the last interview?
4. Describe a time as senior pastor, since the last interview, when you experienced a moment in ministry when your leadership and power were respected and followed at The Sanctuary. How did that feel?
5. What do you discern are our church's next step toward our distinctive of being a black-led, black-centered urban, multiethnic church?
6. Share a story of a moment since the last interview that represents an experience where you noticed white followership at The Sanctuary that was not present before.

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