

**PRACTICING HOPE IN A DIVIDED NEIGHBORHOOD:
THE CALL FOR NARRATIVE ECCLESIOLOGY IN AN URBAN CONGREGATION'S
MINISTRY AMONG YOUTH AND FAMILIES**

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the author offers a practical theological argument for evangelism as the embrace of God *shalom*. The paper focuses on one particular area of a city that is divided along racial cultural, and economic lines. Leaning upon findings in contextual qualitative research, this paper makes the case for a missional youth and family ministry framework rooted in narrative ecclesiology.

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Practicing Hope in a Divided Neighborhood: The Call for Narrative Ecclesiology in an Urban Congregation's Ministry Among Youth and Families

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I. Introduction

Evangelism can be understood as turning “good news” into a verb. This essay seeks to examine evangelism or “good newsing” in the Germantown peninsula of Quincy, Massachusetts. I argue for an understanding and practice of evangelism as the embrace of *shalom*, which can be understood theologically as the ultimate hope for all of creation. To make this case, I first offer a brief description of the socioeconomic and racial division that characterizes the Germantown peninsula.² I then explain how narrative ecclesiology leads to a focus on *shalom* and can assist in breaking down the distinction between evangelism and social action. Next I offer a portrayal of what *shalom* might look like on the Germantown peninsula. Finally, I offer four practical suggestions for embracing *shalom*—practicing hope—on the Germantown peninsula.

II. Division in Germantown

Germantown is a neighborhood in Quincy, Massachusetts, which is located on Boston's south shore. Geographically, it is a peninsula that extends southeast from a busy street with Palmer Street serving as the only direct inward road. A demographical study of Germantown displays a great deal of socioeconomic and racial diversity. However, when Quincy residents refer to Germantown, they are not referring to the entire peninsula, but the portion that begins approximately one mile down the southeastern path. This is where the homogeneously white community characterized by medium- to large-sized homes ends and a dramatic curve in Palmer Street begins.³ What makes the curve dramatic is not only the measure of its arc but the depth of the socioeconomic gap and racial separation it marks between the previously described community on one side and the community of subsidized multi-family housing on the other. On

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² Statistical research, observation, interviews, and local newspaper articles were used in this research.

³ All statistical research is taken from analyzing current information on <http://www.city-data.com>.

one side of the curve is some of the more expensive housing in Quincy and on other is what the City of Quincy website describes as “the most affordable housing in Quincy.”⁴ One on side is a nearly 100% percent White community and on the other is about 48% White, 35% Asian American, 15% Black, and 2% of other backgrounds.⁵

The presence of public housing conjures up a great deal of negative opinions and assumptions about Germantown as some are in complete opposition to the presence of public housing in Quincy. Along with disapproval of public housing comes a great deal of judgment on the people who live there. This can be seen following comments, which were made in response to an article about Germantown in the online version of the local newspaper:

G-town is right on the water and could make a pretty penny for the city if they sold that land. Enough with the hand outs. Do your part and take care of your own kids!!⁶

Those Germantown project apartments are handed down from one family member to another, I for one am sick of supporting these people that live on section 8 and welfare. I truly believe the blogs here that say that [the Quincy Housing Authority] should do random drug testing on all these people, because most of them would be thrown off the system [as] a majority of them are druggies. Germantown is and always will be a swill town.⁷

Germantown is a dump...the trash is all over the place. ...Take a drive down there on a beautiful Sunday and see how crappy it looks with trash out all over the place. The law is to put your trash out after sun down on the night before trash pick up, but it doesn't apply to Germantown because half the residents are illiterate and the other half can't speak English. And some are just gross.⁸

Although Germantown technically includes the entire peninsula, these comments of exaggeration and hate speak directly of the section southeast of the Palmer Street curve. Due to this popular way of talking about Germantown, the residents northwest of the Palmer Street curve tend to denounce affiliation with the peninsula's name. One Germantown peninsula resident who lives northwest of the Palmer Street curve explains her experience. She says, “If

⁴ See <http://www.quincyma.gov/Living/neighborhoods.cfm>

⁵ It is important to note the predominantly White community also continues on the waterfront property around the parameter of much of the Germantown peninsula. These waterfront neighborhoods are accessed through small side streets that extend from Palmer Street before the curve to go around and avoid the diverse areas of the peninsula.

⁶ Responses to “Attack brings back memories of former days in Germantown,” *The Patriot Ledger*, June 10, 2009. <http://www.patriotledger.com/homepage/x683859401/Attack-brings-back-memories-of-former-days-in-Germantown>, commenter username - Mags.

⁷ Ibid, commenter username - Cvjlřj.

⁸ Ibid, commenter username - Kdcares.

someone asks me where I live and I say ‘Germantown,’ I get a strange look like, ‘I thought you were a working professional.’”⁹

The reality is that most people in Quincy have never seen the neighborhood attached to the name “Germantown,” since that would require intentionally driving to the end of the peninsula where there are no businesses. Even those living northwest of the Palmer Street curve can avoid seeing the public housing portion of the peninsula. As this neighborhood is situated in a manner that allows most in Quincy to ignore it, meaningful relationships across the sections of the peninsula are non-existent. This results in the perpetuation of both negative perceptions of “Germantown” and division on the peninsula.

One of the main mediums that contributes to such a negative perception amidst the separation is found in language of certain headlines in Quincy’s local newspaper—*The Patriot Ledger*. A search for “Germantown” on the *Patriot Ledger* website results in headlines such as, “Quincy man arrested on stolen car charges,” “Quincy home-alone case isn’t unusual,” and “Man hit with bat, stabbed in Quincy.” Even articles that attempt to say something positive about the neighborhood are laced with critical and sometimes prejudice implications. For example: “Dropouts help repair Quincy church,” and “Quincy Asians survive English language course.”¹⁰

The 2009 article, entitled “Quincy home-alone case isn’t unusual,” explained that the Quincy Police found a 7-year old child home by himself in Germantown.¹¹ The call was made by an anonymous person who claimed to be a relative of the child. This title of the article can easily perpetuate the idea that Germantown parents are irresponsible and lazy. However, Kathy Quigly, the director of Germantown Neighborhood Center, clarified that the child’s scenario is indeed common for Germantown generally because a great deal of the parents are single mothers working two jobs.¹² There are after-school programs run by the Germantown Neighborhood Center, but there are more children in the neighborhood than can be cared for by the Center.¹³

⁹ Conversational Interviews from September 30 to October 26, 2009.

¹⁰ Notice how the identity of young people from the Germantown neighborhood is reduced to “dropouts” in the very first word of one article’s title. This poses an attack on their human dignity and undermines the fact that the story is about young people who are contributing positively to city and serving as an example to others.

¹¹ Lane Lambert, “Quincy home-alone case isn’t unusual,” *The Patriot Ledger.com*, September 26, 2009. <http://www.patriotledger.com/lifestyle/family/x1800826509/Quincy-home-alone-case-isn-t-unusual>

¹² Ibid; Quigly mentions the work life when interviewed for the article but further elaborated in an interview with me on October 20, 2009.

¹³ Quigly also says that currently no organization is providing for children ages 9 months to 3 years.

Several mothers are on a waiting list for daily child-care with various organizations but cannot wait until that works out to bring home income. While this can create the issue of children being left alone, it also implies that parents in Germantown long for their children to experience a life with opportunities and work diligently to challenge generational poverty for their families. It is the kind of work ethic Sharon Hays highlights in her book, *Flat Broke with Children*, a qualitative research project that shares about the lives of single mothers amidst government-run financial and job assistance programs. Sharon Hays says she was surprised by:

...the sense of hope that [she] regularly encountered among those who were having a harder time. This included mothers who ran through one training program after another, hoping that the next one would prove the ‘right’ one—the one that would help them to get a good job, the kind that offered some flexibility and paid wages sufficient to support their family. It included all those women who took jobs paying minimum wage, jobs with irregular schedules, and jobs that were less than full time. It even included many of those who were forced to take unpaid workfare placements and who interpreted these placements as a chance to get much needed work experience.¹⁴

Despite such determination, there is an opposing public perception that Germantown residents are unmotivated and lazy. Such labeling is primarily due to opinions made from a distance with the unfortunate assistance of biased language and coverage in news media. The goal oriented work ethic of persistence described above—though it may regretfully lead to children staying at home alone—displays that deep within the life of Germantown is a motivation and a desire for an improved way of life. Sharon Hays, with a strictly sociological lens on, describes this motivation and desire as “hope.” In many ways, it is hope, as it relies on parents envisioning a better life for their children and believing it is possible. However, it would then be a misplaced hope as it relies on the societal imagination of “getting ahead” that has fostered division along socioeconomic and racial lines in the first place.¹⁵ As we discern the work of evangelism among youth and families in Germantown, we must consider the division described above and the desire for authentic hope alongside a Christian theological understanding of hope.

¹⁴ Sharon Hays, *Flat Broke with Children: Women in the Age of Welfare Reform*. (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2003), 113.

¹⁵ See Walter Brueggemann, *Truth Speaks to Power: The Countercultural Nature of Scripture* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013); See also Charles Campbell, *Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).

III. God's *Shalom* as the Good News of Hope

One driving conversation in academic reflections on evangelism over the past three decades has been focused on the connection and distinction between evangelism and social action.¹⁶ The call for this ongoing conversation is the recognition of an overlap between the two partnered with a caution that conflating the evangelism and social action might lead Christians to avoid the church's responsibility to verbally share the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Germantown's situation is one in which a Christian congregation may see the need for evangelism and social action, but may find itself unsure of where to begin. Insight from narrative theology can be especially helpful in theological and strategic discernment. More specifically, a narrative theological understanding of the church and its mission can lay the foundation for an integrative practice of evangelism and social action among youth and families in Germantown, as such an understanding reorients our focus on the hope, promise, and embrace of *shalom*.

It is common to share the Gospel by first pointing out the reality of sin and the need for salvation, then explaining the necessity of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and finally declaring the opportunity for human beings to experience salvation by accepting the lordship of Jesus the Christ. In this narrative, the church is often understood as the collection of those who accept His lordship, and the church is portrayed as the recipients and tellers of the gospel. However, this narrative fails to recognize how the church is part of the gospel story. A narrative theological understanding of the church (and the telling of the Gospel) recognizes that the church was brought about as the fulfillment of God's promise to cultivate Israel into a peoplehood that will be blessing to all nations (Genesis 22:18). It is this peoplehood, beginning with the Hebrews whose cry was graciously heard by God, who would be called to be a testimony of God's *shalom* in the world (Isaiah 11:9). Nicholas Wolterstorff describes *shalom* as "right harmonious relationship" with God, fellow humans, and nature along with a necessary sense of enjoyment or "delight" in them.¹⁷ Former urban church planter and current theological educator, Mark Gornik, furthers Wolterstorff's insight, as he adds:

¹⁶ For an introduction to that conversation, See Ronald J. Sider, *Evangelism and Social Action: Uniting a Church to Heal a Lost and Broken World* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1993).

¹⁷ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 70. Quoted in Gornik, 101. See fn 18.

From our covenant relationship with God to our social institutions, *shalom* is God putting back together a broken world. To take another image of peace from Isaiah, *shalom* is not just the wolf and the lamb co-existing but the world and the lamb finding their rest in one another (11:6-7; 65:25). *Shalom* is more than physical safety for the child playing near the cobra's nest; it is the child and the cobra successfully playing together...According to Micah, peace visits when people live without fear, without want of food or shelter, and therefore are able to be open to others. Thus *shalom* is good news for a world where economic and social practices run counter to God's purposes for creation.¹⁸

Leaning on Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., Gornik argues that as *shalom* is God's way and identity for God's peoplehood, *shalom* runs counter to the way of sin and can be understood as God's sanctification and holiness made known in the world. As the scriptural narrative continues, Jesus took on the very identity of Israel and made this peoplehood—this chosen-ness—open to all people of all nations, groups, and languages through his life, death, resurrection, and *offering of the Holy Spirit*.¹⁹ It is the offering of the Holy Spirit, which is often left out of the story but essential for a narrative theological understanding of the church and its practice. As theologian, Bryan P. Stone, notes in his book, *Evangelism After Christendom*, "...the Spirit's operation connects the story of Jesus with the story of Israel and with the story of the church, thereby making all three a single story."²⁰ This suggests that the gospel story is not told in full until we tell about the church. In other words, the fulfillment of God's promise to bring about a peoplehood that is uniquely called, empowered, and expected to live into the way of Jesus is part of the Good News!

It is important to note here that the church is not merely a random group of people who happen to have personal relationships with Christ; the church is a peoplehood uniquely called, empowered, and expected to be a "sign, instrument, and foretaste" of God's coming reign—of God's *shalom*.²¹ In other words, the church is uniquely called, empowered, and expected to be radically interdependent and oriented toward justice, peace, and the communal flourishing of people from all nations, tribes, and tongues (Revelation 7:9). The church is to be God's living testimony of hope and God's living invitation for the world to participate in that hope. That said,

¹⁸ Mark R. Gornik, *To Live in Peace: Biblical Faith and the Changing Inner City* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 101.

¹⁹ Lesslie Newbigin, *Lesslie Newbigin Missionary Theologian: A Reader*. Compiled by Paul Weston, (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2006), 51.

²⁰ Bryan P. Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 76.

²¹ Newbigin, 100; See also Darrel L. Guder, *The Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998).

being the church is clearly not a small endeavor. We have obviously not lived up to our call in all times and places. It is fitting for John Howard Yoder to say, "...the very existence of the church is its primary task."²² The hope of evangelism is a new social body of peace so the way of evangelism is a new social body of peace. As Lesslie Newbigin writes,

The Church bears in its body the reconciling power of the atonement in so far as it is marked by the scars of the Passion, and it is therefore the bearer of the risen life. And, if you see the mission of the Church in that sense, then all this futile discussion between evangelism and social action disappears...²³

In light of the discussion above, *shalom* pushes our understanding and practice of evangelism to embody a nuance of the concept of neighborhood. While the term "neighborhood" often refers to a designated space with socially and geographically defined borders, the church is called to a different notion of neighborhood. *Neighbor-hood* for the church is a way of life, similar to brotherhood or sisterhood or siblinghood, but always open to welcoming and being changed by others. The church's *neighbor-hood* is one in which we are continually challenging the boundaries and power structures that attempt to limit our imagination of who our neighbors are (Luke 10:29). Interestingly, this is not a call to avoid the boundaries and power structures, but rather to creatively confront them through the hope—the *shalom*—found in Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and offering of the Holy Spirit. The question that remains is what *shalom* looks like in Germantown, and that is where we now turn our attention.

IV. The Mission of *Shalom* in Germantown

Good news for Germantown begins with God's love for Germantown.²⁴ The creator of the universe sees the people of Germantown in their complex situation and deeply loves them. God is there in the midst of them and hopes with them for something new.²⁵ This news is unique

²² John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1994), 150.

²³ Newbigin, 136-37.

²⁴ This is reflective of the nature of God made known throughout scripture from hearing the cry of the Hebrews in Genesis to the bringing about of the church in Acts and the vision of hope in Revelation; Also See Gornik, 195. Gornik says this about the context of his focus the Sandtown neighborhood in Baltimore; Also See Stone, 212. Stone suggests all evangelism begins with acknowledging that the world is created "out of an overflow of love."

²⁵ See Guder for a discussion of *missio dei*. In evangelism, we join in God's mission as God is already present and active; Also See Albert, C. Outler, *Evangelism and Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit*, (Discipleship: Nashville, 2000), 35. The Wesleyan understanding of prevenient grace shapes evangelism as a practice of pointing to and joining in what God is already stirring up in a given context or situation, rather than attempting to bring God to a particular context or situation.

as it is contradictory to social thought and practice of the many in Quincy who are accustomed to looking down upon and disregarding the people of Germantown. They present Germantown as problematic, which establishes their own place of power and could eventually lead to the removal of Germantown's public housing residents. Evangelism (or *neighbor-hood*) in Germantown is the fostering of a community that is centered on the hope of Christ and trusting in the Spirit to unfold the story of *shalom*. In this section, we will consider three ways in which *shalom* challenges, supports and/or transforms certain aspects of Germantown. *Shalom* offers and calls for: 1) the end of marginalization, 2) an economy of thanksgiving rather than one of scarcity, and 3) a light shone upon Germantown's positive and contributive stories rather than a dishonest public portrayal that fosters an imagination of hate and destruction.

The marginalization of Germantown has no place in *shalom*, particularly because the marginalization is dependent on a stark absence of justice. Families already in a position of vulnerability are distanced and hidden away from the life of the city to be scorned and forgotten. *Shalom* calls for dramatic moves toward reconciliation and *is* a bridge across the Palmer Street gap; a bridge that is so frequently and joyfully crossed by families of both "tribes" that it becomes hard to identify a demographic distinction between the two sides. Following the proposals of theologian, Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *shalom* changes the way Germantown is understood as a place, as it calls the two communities of meaning-making on the peninsula to come together and give a new bodily meaning to Germantown.²⁶

Such community is intertwined with good news concerning economy. Of course, the news may not appear so great to those who are accustomed to monetary power as it would to those living on the margins. It is the same news that resulted in the young rich ruler walking away from Jesus sad and grieving after Jesus asked him sell all he had and give to the poor (Mark 10:17-22). He had hard time dealing with the reality that *shalom* is always good news to the poor (Isaiah 61:1-2; Luke 4:18-19). However, Jesus' call is not bad news for wealthy families. The good news is that, by God's grace, both wealthy and underprivileged families can

²⁶ I am referring here to postmodern place theory as seen in Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church*. (Oxford University Press: New York, 2007), 11, 25, 36, 44. She explains that framing an observational study through this lens allows one to focus on patterns of bodily living in relation to meaning-making rather than merely the sociological statistics of a geographical space. Statistics in the case of Germantown often refers to a geographical space that includes people who deny they live in Germantown. It inaccurately implies a diverse community with a middle-class housing market. The meaning made in Germantown is much different than the statistics often imply.

be in the kind of community for which they have been created and live into God's hope for all creation.

Germantown's segregation does not support communal flourishing. Rather it is an embodiment of the economic system Kanye West laments when rapping (from the perspective of the marginalized), "They made us hate ourselves and love their wealth."²⁷ Those in public housing have to pass by the more affluent neighborhoods—neighborhoods in which they are not welcomed—every time they travel for work, grocery shopping, school, or any other purchase and public service. They are caught in what W.E.B. DuBois called "double consciousness," meaning that along with having personal identities, they are constantly faced with having to view themselves through the negative perception of others' lenses.²⁸ They are presented with a social ontology of negation.²⁹ *Shalom* offers the chance for all participants to acknowledge difference, but with authentic mutuality and embrace rather than dominance and exclusion.³⁰

Embracing each other in *shalom* offers an economy of sharing household responsibilities. The current economy in Germantown supports workaholism, young children being left home alone, and radical isolation. *Shalom*, however, is one of radical interdependence in which sharing resources, offering child-care, and being actual friends (rather than simply contractual partners) are normative. The "rich rulers" of the Germantown peninsula might lament and resist *shalom*'s call for them to share wealth and privilege. But even if they do not realize it, their flourishing is actually just as dependent on God and others as those on the margins.³¹ The "right relations" of *shalom* makes space for this realization and the bodily interactive response of thankfulness, which *is* the economy of *shalom*.³² Instead of value being placed on money and possessions, it is placed on hospitality and friendship. Interestingly, practical theologian,

²⁷ Kanye West, "All Falls Down," *College Dropout*, 2003. To be clear here, West admits even in this song that he actively supports the destructive system he raps about.

²⁸ W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2007), 8. DuBois defines "double-consciousness" as the "...sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity."

²⁹ It should be noted that this is also a popular way to theologically describe the nature of evil.

³⁰ See Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 110. Similar to others cited in this paper, Volf discusses *shalom* as synonymous with the eschatological community often referred to as "the kingdom of God" or "the new creation." He offers a significant insight, suggesting that focusing on this coming community offers us the ability to recognize the temporary and faulty nature of the hopes (power, prestige, etc.) that guide us toward separation. If we place our hope in the coming *shalom* of God, we can begin to practice it now.

³¹ Martin Luther King, Jr. *A Testament of Hope*. Ed. James Washington, "A Christmas Sermon on Peace." (San Francisco: Harper 2004), 253-258; Stone, 217.

³² Ibid.

Christine Pohl argues that those on the socio-economic margins have much more to teach in this area than those in affluence.³³ The good news is that such teaching and learning can happen as residents on the peninsula trust in the Spirit to create their life together.

At the heart of *shalom* is an intentional working toward the end of violence. Perhaps the most obvious form of violence concerning Germantown is seen in the *Patriot Ledger* newspaper through the headlines and stories that shape an imagination of hate towards the residents southeast of the Palmer Street curve. They publicly rip the human dignity from these residents so that others consider them the problem of Quincy. *Shalom* looks like the repentance of the journalists and those who support this negative portrayal of these residents. Following Martin Luther King, we learn, however, that this is just one move in *shalom*. He writes, “True peace is not merely the absence of some negative force—tension, confusion or war; it is the presence of some positive force—justice, good will and brotherhood.”³⁴ *Shalom* calls for the telling of the good stories that daily flow from the lives of these Germantown residents. In other words, it is right to say that good news *for* Germantown is good news *about* Germantown. A new imagination concerning these residents is formed in *shalom*—an imagination that recognizes their created-ness in the image of God and the way the Spirit may be strengthening them to thrive beyond the violence directed toward them.³⁵ In other words, *shalom* announces an end to the separation of Quincy from the stories of joy, friendship, and strength among those on the peninsula’s margins.

V. Embracing *Shalom* in Germantown

Evangelism is often narrowly discussed as the work toward a conversion moment, but if *shalom* is our goal, we practice evangelism differently. If *shalom* is our goal, we even measure evangelism differently. If we want to report numbers, then perhaps we can count how many youth and families have become friends across racial and socioeconomic divisive lines, how many children are cared for so parents can go to work, how many policies have been changed to promote de-marginalization and reconciliation, how many people have learned new languages in order to be better friends, and how many good stories about Germantown show up in the *Patriot*

³³ Ibid; Christine Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1999), 117.

³⁴ Martin Luther King, Jr. *A Testament of Hope*. Ed. James Washington, “Nonviolence and Racial Justice,” (San Francisco: Harper 2004), 6.

³⁵ Jeremiah Wright, Jr., “What Makes You So Strong?” *What Makes You So Strong?: Sermons of Joy and Strength from Jeremiah Wright, Jr.* (Judson Press: Valley Forge, 1993). 158-60.

Ledger. In short, if *shalom* is the goal, then evangelism must emphasize the way of life made known in Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and offering of the Holy Spirit. Interestingly, there is one congregation on the Germantown peninsula, and it is located just northwest of the Palmer Street curve. While it is technically on the more affluent part of the peninsula, it is very much near the center, giving it a great deal of potential to embody the bridge of *shalom*. In this section, I will highlight four practical suggestions for this congregation to embrace *shalom* and practice evangelism among youth and families in Germantown.

Learning from Youth

The majority of the youth in the congregation's youth ministry live southeast of the Palmer Street curve. Nearly fifty young people are part of the church, and they represent the socioeconomic and cultural diversity of the peninsula. However, the adults in the congregation live northwest of the Palmer Street curve or do not live on the peninsula at all. The adult population in the church does not reflect the diversity of Germantown and most know very little about the young people in the youth group and surrounding neighborhoods. They appreciate where the church building is located and that the youth ministry connects with the neighborhood, but there is a clear separation between adults and youth. Only a handful of students attend the Sunday morning worship gatherings, and only a handful of adults volunteer during the Tuesday night youth worship gathering. I suggest the congregation organize times for various small groups of adults to observe the youth group worship gathering over the course of a year. The point of the observation would not be to give direction to youth leaders nor focus on perceived disciplinary needs. Instead, it would simply be an opportunity to learn how these young people enjoy worshipping God and to listen to their stories of celebration. Each month, adults can gather to tell the stories of celebration and share the insight learned from the students. The goal here is to foster a new imagination of Germantown.

Becoming Good Neighbors

Despite the benefits of scheduled church gatherings and digital communication (i.e. Facebook groups), the best way for families of different socioeconomic and racial backgrounds to share life is to live near each other. That said, the second suggestion is for the congregation to prayerfully consider sending congregants to move to move southeast of the Palmer Street curve or as near to it as possible. The purpose would not be to simply take up space. Rather, the focus

would be on becoming good neighbors and helping the congregation as a whole become good neighbors in Germantown by intentionally getting to know the families of youth in the youth ministry as well as other families in the neighborhood. This could look like sharing meals or volunteering to babysit young children, hosting game nights, or simply being present for neighborhood activities. These parishioners can serve as mutual friends between Germantown residents and other parishioners of the congregation as they trust the Spirit to bring about community.

Establishing a Community Garden Together

Theologian, James Cone, insightfully explains that the logic of dominance that leads to acts of racial and economic injustice is the same that leads to “exploitation of animals and the ravaging of nature.”³⁶ The two issues cannot be separated. He continues, “The survival of the earth is a moral issue for everybody. If we do not save the earth from human destructive behavior, no one will survive. That fact alone ought to be enough to inspire people of all colors to join hands in the fight for a just and sustainable planet.”³⁷ I suggest that the congregation’s youth ministry start a community vegetable garden in one of the various fields southwest of the Palmer Street curve. Doing this builds upon the previous suggestion and promotes an even more faithful embrace of *shalom*.³⁸ The garden can begin with the youth and adults of the congregation but with a clear invitation to the parents of the youth. The goal here would be for families of socioeconomic and racial difference to partner in mutual commitment to the Germantown neighborhood and form connection, shared memories, and a common story along the way.

Redistributing the Privilege of Positive Stories

In a context in which most are willing to distance themselves from “Germantown” and easily accept negative commentary about the neighborhood, it is clear that having positive stories shared about one’s own residential area is a privilege. Conversely, identifying with Germantown or insisting on a different narrative about “Germantown” can result in someone giving up his or her privilege. Leaning on Jesus’ call to sell everything and give to the poor, we can name several ways to redistribute privilege as a way of embracing *shalom* on the Germantown peninsula. One

³⁶ James Cone, “Whose Earth is it Anyway,” *Sojourners*. Vol. 36, July 2007. p. 15.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ See above for Wolterstorff’s explanation of *shalom* as right relationship among all of creation and God.

significant way to lean into this call is to learn and share positive stories about Germantown. The participants in the peninsula's congregation can commit to sharing good stories about Germantown to their friends, co-workers, and on social media. Going a step further, they can also commit to submitting good stories of all the Germantown neighborhoods to the *Patriot Ledger*. Of course, getting to a place of sharing such stories would likely first require practical moves that are similar to the three described above—(1) learning from youth in the congregation, (2) having at least a small group of congregation members move southeast of the Palmer Street curve or as close to it as possible, and (3) partnering with youth and families on the peninsula in a meaningful project that embraces *shalom*.

VI. Conclusion

In this brief study, I have offered a description of the socioeconomic and racial division on the Germantown peninsula, an explanation of the significance of *shalom* for faithful evangelism on the Germantown peninsula, and four practical suggestions for leaning into *shalom* and practicing hope among youth and families in Germantown. The focus on *shalom* highlights the need for a narrative ecclesiological understanding and practice of mission. While this proposal may have insights for ministry in other contexts, my goal has been a modest one. This paper flows out of my work as a theological educator but also that of a church member deeply interested in faithfully being present and reaching our community. There are certainly several other factors to consider as we move forward, but I do hope this paper is a helpful contribution to the on-going conversation and practice of ministry among youth and families in Germantown. May we, by grace, faithfully receive the call to bear witness to God's *shalom* made known in Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and offering of the community-creating Holy Spirit.

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