Hermeneutics and Communications

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Professor

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**Assignment**

### *Developmental Readings*

Review Assignment #3, the course essential elements, assigned readings, and recommended readings to identify selections of books and scholarly articles to identify and select developmental reading sources and entries.

* Refer to the “[Student Guide to Developmental Readings](https://drive.google.com/file/d/161V_FaYR2BnNGCSFUlWPjUSIQzcH04Hq/view?usp=share_link)” for updated information on sample comments, rubrics, and key definitions related to developmental readings.

**Source One:**O’Leary, Z. (2007). *The social science jargon buster: The key terms you need to*

*know*. Sage Publications.

**Comment 1:***(from COM-803 Hermeneutics & Communication)*

**Quote/Paraphrase:**The key to understanding social science terms is to engage, familiarize, and immerse oneself in the jargon of a discipline. For one who has never had exposure to its etymology, social science terms may be challenging to understand and may seem vague, pretentious, or meaningless to the point that it makes no sense. To alleviate the stressors that come with learning a foreign language of social science terms, consulting with professors, lecturers, tutors, and even academic peers will assist in gaining a better understanding of their usages and how to apply them (O’Leary, 2007, Preface. ix).

**Essential Element:** This comment is associated with interpretive methods in social research.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:**The comment is a variant reading to understand social science terminology and apply or utilize it in action research. To meet or match the challenge of any academic discipline, one must first understand the building blocks and core of the subject. The hermeneutic of the discipline lies within being able to know its etymology. In preparation for traveling to a foreign country, one must research the fundamentals of that country. Familiarizing oneself with an unvisited land's language, customs, laws, and moral codes of conduct will make for a better traveling experience. Not doing so could land the tourist on a not-so-pleasant journey. The same analogy applies to the student traveling through the land of hermeneutics.

**Contextualization:** The task of the action research project is to propose a solution to a particular church ministry's growth dilemma and address the stagnation of its mandate and commitment to the surrounding community. The objective is to introduce socially conscious ministry concepts to connect the pew to the pavement and restore a mutual admiration this historical institution once had. Harmonizing social science concepts and religion or, in this context, theology will require implementing an education model to franchise the membership. For this to come to fruition, the responsibility will be to connect the social science etymological dots and examine sociological principles that will provide a sensible hermeneutic for the focus group of key church leaders.

**Source Two:** Booth, W. C., Colomb, G. G., Williams, J. M., Bizup, J., Fitzgerald, W. T. (2016).

*The craft of research: Fourth edition*. The University of Chicago Press & London.

**Comment 2:***(from COM-803 Hermeneutics & Communication)*

**Quote/Paraphrase:** “Doing research carefully and reporting it is hard work, consisting of many tasks, often competing for your attention simultaneously. Moreover, no matter how carefully you plan, research follows a crooked path, taking unexpected turns, sometimes up blind alleys, and even looping back on itself. As complex as that process is, we will work it through step by step so that you can see how its parts work together. When you can manage its parts, you can manage the often intimidating whole and look forward to doing more research with greater confidence” (Booth, 2016, p. 23).

**Essential Element:** This comment is associated with reading techniques for scholarly research.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is a variant to the understanding of being an efficient researcher in asking the right questions and finding answers to connect with the reader. The requirement of research is an extensive amount of reading. Knowing what and how to read is essential to discovering and resolving a problem, posing, or presenting arguments, gathering data, and supporting presuppositions. Developing the skills to become an efficient researcher can only occur with scholarly reading skills. As mentioned above, the sources to assist in engaging in research are reading for a purpose and with a goal in mind. "Research can be gathering information to answer a problem that solves a problem" (Booth, 2016, p. 30). The tools provided in the chapters throughout the text take the researcher beyond the fundamentals of simply reading for a course or completing assignments. The objective is to meet the researcher's needs beyond graduation and to guide and help organize it so that literary work can be understood and garner the respect that the labor of scholarly research deserves.

**Contextualization:** The reality of undertaking a church growth issue is profound in reading journal articles, books, and other materials in preparation for an action research project. It is serious in this instance because going into a context where a legitimate problem exists and knowing what it is has developed a burden within to seek an answer. Researching and providing an action plan is ripe and suitable for a particular church. With the change in leadership dynamics, post-COVID recovery has been challenging to revitalize the ministry and congregational transformation. For these reasons and more, the incentive is for the researcher to get a firm grip on the research mechanics and provide a hermeneutic of that research that connects to the recipients. The personal goal of the researcher is to grow in his understanding and master the efficiency of the action research project's reading, discovery, and development processes.

**Source Three:**Bellamy, Brian Odem (2016). An examination of prevalent twenty-first century

models of community engagement by the black churches. Degree: PhD, [University of Exeter](file:///F%3A%5CCOM-803%20Hermeneutics%5CUniversity%20of%20Exeter) URL: <http://hdl.handle.net/10871/24285>.

**Comment 3:** *(from COM-803 Hermeneutics & Communication)*

**Quote/Paraphrase:** “Existing scholarship has shown that the Black church historically has engaged the oppressed communities they have served by addressing their secular and social needs in addition to their spiritual ones, with a sense of mission to affirm human dignity and social justice. This praxis through community engagement became necessary because of the oppressive contexts in which the Black churches were founded and has continued in varied ways in tandem with shifts in the social location of Black people in America. The interrelated aims of this thesis are to discover the theological motivations of black church community engagement agents and to consider the extent to which the community engagement initiatives of the black churches of the twenty-first century address critical theological criteria from Black Theology for advancing liberation; each of which will help to illuminate theological implications for the continued social relevance of the black churches” (Odem, 2016, p. 2).

**Essential Element:** This comment is associated with faith-integrated hermeneutics.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is an additive to an existing understanding of the Black church's historical influence on social change, liberation, social justice, and its ability to be effective through community engagement. Post-COVID-19, traditional Black congregations have been unable to recoup losses of people and financial resources impacting spirituality. Black congregations situated in marginalized and highly distressed zip codes or urban areas that invested the bare minimum of themselves or none into the community are unable to turn to the same for support. Communities in which the church has neglected develop the "Janet Jackson, what have you done for me lately mentality" when it solicits support from those it has not invested. Community engagement in inner city or urban areas by the church is vital to the reciprocal dependency of the relationship between the church and the community.

**Contextualization:** In Louisville, Kentucky, the entity referred to as the Central District Association (CDA) is a tentacle of the General Association of Baptists in Kentucky. It is the largest district in the state, hosting approximately 150 missionary Baptist churches. Only ten percent of these churches with 300+ active memberships have successfully survived the pandemic, meaning they have the numbers to sustain their ministries despite it. Of the ten percent mentioned earlier, approximately forty percent had budgets that allowed them to continue outreach and community engagement activities. However, only four churches of the forty percent could effectively minister on multiple levels to impact their communities, influence socio-political matters, and provide quality social media streams of their services across various platforms. These four churches, one of which is the most prominent Black church in Kentucky with over 10,000 members, have three campuses across two states, have the largest ministry staff, and have a senior pastor who is also the president of the 107th HBCU. Ministry innovation has allowed only a few churches to model community engagement post-pandemic toward congregational transformation and institutional revitalization.

**Source Four:** Allen, Shaonta’, E. (2023). *Is the black church dead?* *Religious*

*resilience and the contemporary functions of black christianity*.*Religions, 14*(4), 460.

**Comment 4:** *(from COM-803 Hermeneutics & Communication)*

**Quote/Paraphrase:** “To understand the power of the Black Church, it must first be understood that there is no disjunction between the Black Church and the Black community. The Church is the spiritual face of the Black community, and whether one is a “church member” or not is beside the point in any assessment of the importance and meaning of the Black Church. Because of the peculiar nature of the Black experience and the centrality of institutionalized religion in the development of that experience…the Black Church, then, is in some sense a “universal church,” claiming and representing all Blacks out of a long tradition that looks back to the time when there was only the Black Church to bear witness to “who” or “what” a man was as he stood at the bar of his community” (Allen, 2023, p. 1).

**Essential Element:** This comment is associated with faith-integrated hermeneutics.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is a variant because it gives further insight into the tensions of the Black Church yesterday and today in contrast to the church’s relevance to its community despite sociocultural forces that impress upon it. Such forces, including political pressure, attempt to use their leaders to push agendas and solicit support from congregants who usually do not see a return on their vested political return on investment. The objective of the Black institution is to invest and pour into the institutions that make the church what it is. Despite the isms that attempt to knock the church and its community off its square, the theology of racialized religion wedges the interdependence of both. It has weakened the long-standing relationship that held both institutions together. “The concept of religious resilience as a framework for understanding how and why a religion’s “afterlife” is sustained despite macro-level processes that might undermine its prominence” (Allen, 2023, p. 1).

**Contextualization:** Inseparability. The agenda of theoretical divide and conquer. In remembering the progression of Black Baptist churches in Louisville, Kentucky, when its pastors began leaving their predominance and integrating racialized seminaries was a two-edged sword. It was only possible to walk away with fresh ministry models' structures and formats by ingesting ideas that homogenized their theology—the effect of the degeneration of specific power and control, making the Black church and its community inseparable. There is a need to go back to the future and return to it forever. Social institutions have the ability or the lack thereof to influence community behavior and shape attitudes and belief systems, worldviews, self-perceptions, and responsibility to themselves. Black pride was not about violence, though some misused it to the demise of the populus, causing a misrepresentation of the concept. During Black America's tumultuous yet formative years, pride evolved for uplift, progress, and equality, unlike its counterpart, which was to subjugate. Anytime two different elements integrate, it creates a hybrid. The fruit of that hybrid can be a blessing and a curse, yet Afro ingenuity or the dipping of an idea, ideology, theory, or practice in chocolate made foreign concepts plausible and cognitively digestible. In returning the church to becoming socially conscious and engaging, there must first be a model consisting of a description of entrepreneurship, behavior, leadership concepts, and a sensitization process in areas where Novocain caused apathy. The problem of social disconnect from meaningful community engagement was that, over time, some learned not to care. Socially conscious ministry can move the religious institution beyond Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas breadbasket.

**Source Five:** Jones, Melanie C. (2022). *Who’s saving whom? Black millennials and*

*the revivification of religious communities. In religion, race, and covid-19: Confronting white supremacy in the pandemic*. Edited by S. M. Floyd-Thomas. New York: NYU Press, pp. 54–77.

**Comment Five:** *(from COM-803 Hermeneutics & Communication)*

**Quote/Paraphrase:** "The COVID-19 pandemic has marked a viral crisis of faith, as shelter-in-place mandates forced faith communities to shift from institutional edifices to streaming websites to remain spiritually vibrant, socially relevant, and economically solvent. In hopes of staying afloat, many Black religious communities (ranging from makeshift store-front churches to mega ministries) turned to millennials—people born between 1980 and 2000—to shift connectivity modes to virtual platforms. Millennials represent the largest, most educated generation in the United States and are digital natives responsible for the rise and promulgation of social media (Facebook et al., etc.). The pandemic unveils a glaring generation gap within the Black Church tradition. Contrary to most anecdotal accounts, many Black millennials have launched into the digital deep to revive faith communities in the United States". (Jones, 2022 p. 54)

**Essential Element:** This comment is associated with faith-integrated hermeneutics.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is variant because it validates the need for a reciprocal relationship between the church and the community. COVID-19 exposed many socio-religious, socioeconomic, and sociopolitical vulnerabilities. Places of all shapes and sizes of worship found themselves on a level playing field. It was the millennial generation, the digital natives, that previous generations of churchgoers, in some cases, were forced to lean upon to maintain a religious presence creating digital relationships. The pandemic quarantine interrupted the flow of ministries. The pandemic quarantine intercepted the fellowship of believers. Churches that were "four-walled" only had to adapt if they wanted to survive. COVID-19 changed how churches, large and small, conducted business. Places of worship lost members to pandemic death; some never returned to the church post-pandemic because of disillusionment. After witnessing the church stripped down to social media presence, others decided that pastors and their agendas looked much different. Now that there was distance, people could compare. Sometimes, people can be so close in a situation that they cannot think and see for themselves. In the Black community amongst churches, the pandemic brought out a humility that has been long overdue and much needed. Those communities that circumference well-maintained churches became the enterprise pastors who realized they needed to survive ministerially.

**Contextualization:** Post-COVID-19, churches are finding churches struggling to regain their footing, recoup the loss of members, and find new ways to do old things. The pandemic changed the trajectory of how people communicated, shopped, conducted their business, and worshipped. Churches with a belief system that “too much of the world was coming into the church” found themselves having to rely on technology during and after the pandemic, resulting in a shift in belief systems. Places of worship had to adapt to a new way of doing things such as giving, bible study, fellowship, and how they connected with their communities outside the four walls of the church. When in-person worship was restored, many churches maintained their social media presence. Some found it advantageous because it extended an olive branch to a generation of believers who are digital natives, the millennials. This group of believers brought a digital revival to the church, which caused quite a few to further develop their online church and ministries, as well as new funding streams for the church by creating new platforms of participation and giving. Online or social media churches through platforms such as Facebook and YouTube provided convenience to senior members, those who worked on Sundays, and those who just decided that they preferred online worship and ministry. Digital churches became so famous that people stopped coming to church altogether, leaving pastors to preach to half-empty churches and padded pews. Now, the challenge for pastors has become how we can avoid the forsaking of assembling ourselves. What doctrine, program, structure, or method can be developed to draw churchgoers from the comforts of their homes out of their pajamas and back to the building?

**Source Six:** DeVries, B. A. (2016). *Spiritual gifts for biblical church growth.* In die skriflig, 50

(1), 1-10. https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v50i1.2090

**Comment Six:** *(from COM-803 Hermeneutics & Communication)*

**Quote/Paraphrase:** “This article examines the use of spiritual gifts for church growth, particularly in relation to the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit. The article begins with defining spiritual gifts and highlights their purpose for growing the church. This is followed by two practical considerations: How should Christian believers use spiritual gifts for church growth, and how should church leaders motivate gift use for this purpose? Since the Holy Spirit works through believers to build up the body of Christ, advocates of biblical church growth should seek to employ his means to motivate spiritual giftedness in the church.” (DeVries, 2016 Abstract)

**Essential Element:** This comment is associated with faith-integrated hermeneutics.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** Spiritual gifts indwell the believer in Christ at salvation. They are the tools of God (Rom. 12:3-8), Christ (Eph. 4:7-12), and the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 12:4-11) that equips believers to accomplish the work of the body of Christ in the local church and the world. This comment is additive for it confirms that some ministries need a reactivation or re-acclimation of spiritual gifts and a refresher course concerning deploying gifts in this post-COVID-19 dispensation. More recently, church growth has received attention with the growing interest in church revitalization (DeVries, 2016 p. 1). Church renewal and revitalization is essential especially for traditional Black churches that have minimal or no connection to the community other than food lines or baskets on certain holidays. Seminars, workshops, or special studies would be of value in sensitizing congregations stuck in a church growth rut, regarding the need for community engagement through social conscious ministry.

**Contextualization:** In the post-COVID-19 dispensation, churches that are struggling to rebuild their memberships and getting those that have become comfortable with worship streaming across social media platforms would benefit from educational settings that would focus on the tangible manifestation of spiritual gifts, but more importantly, their trustworthy source. There are churches who have those in the congregation that are degreed and can develop and tailor curriculum germane to their dynamic. Pastors can present sermon series about spiritual gifts. Sunday school lessons can also be of use to reinforce and support pastoral preaching. Special studies by denominational experts can introduce new church growth and evangelism concepts that would revive the interest and passion for the church's work. To experience this biblical church growth, church leaders should intentionally work to develop the spiritual giftedness of church members under their spiritual care. Though only the Spirit can produce the desired results, church leaders must plant and water. (DeVries 2016, p. 9).

**Source Six:** Wormack, Willie Lee (2021). *Church revitalization: fashioning church for growth****.***

*doctoral dissertations and projects*. 2848. <https://digitalcomons.liberty.edu/doctoral/2848>

**Comment Six:** *(from COM-803 Hermeneutics & Communication)*

**Quote/Paraphrase:** “This thesis research project is an approach to resolve the issues of the critically declined and dying Friendship Baptist Church, whose membership cannot support a viable ministry. The church needs a visionary plan, leadership, and team support to assist with church development and growth. The case study approach will explore the meanings and beliefs of Christianity for the church in the church’s social setting. This study investigates cultural faith associations with the church. The objective is to build ten percent of membership by using intervention to partner and share with other bodies within the community.” (Womack 2021 p. 4)

**Essential Element:** This comment is associated with interpretive methods in social research.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** The mixed-method research approach to address a growth and development crisis in a declining church is additive to understanding what is required to revive and restore such viability and effectiveness. Though the context is rural, the case study analysis serves as a model for investigating a declining church despite its geographical and sociological context, whether rural or urban. In Luke 5, Jesus' disciples failed to catch fish. At His instruction, Simon Peter launched into the deep, and he cast the net for a catch. There were so many fish that the net began to break; the disciples signaled to their partners in other ships to come and help them. About the declining church, the emphasis of the passage of scripture is not so much on the multitude of fish caught as it is on the need for partnership in an overwhelming moment. The decline of any situation is in the similitude of a breaking net. In a declining church with growth issues, the study suggests using a cooperative approach to draw from the resources, expertise, and assistance by establishing partnerships with entities outside the church.

**Contextualization:** This study concerning Friendship Baptist Church is an excellent model that mirrors a similar context on which to base an action research project. The investigative research of the church's cultural faith associations outside and the congregational dynamics from within provides the qualitative and quantitative data required to identify the problem, formulate questions, and begin the research process toward resolution. This case study about the declining church, its growth issues, and a congregation unable to maintain its viability is the perfect storm for a turnaround model of congregational transformation. Places of worship are still recovering from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The smaller churches insistent on maintaining certain traditions, ideologues, and ways of doing things failed to see the need to evolve and are struggling to return to their forever. Those places where the "all we need is the bible and the holy spirit" is espoused are the ones that felt the need to remain the way they were despite seeing the community demographic around them change for the good or the bad and had no input or face and place at the table of discussion. While it is true that the bible and the holy spirit are needed, that is not all. First Corinthians 3:9 reminds believers that they are laborers together with God. This bible verse suggests that while there is a heavenly responsibility and work, there is also an earthly responsibility and work. Churchgoers cannot simply ride the pew fifty-two days out of the year and expect something miraculous from on High to occur. A two-part work must take place simultaneously, from within and without. Wormack (2021, p. 3) states that the epistemological research process shows several non-participating church members and lacks the organization and administration to enact discipleship and evangelism within the community. One primary concern is that the church needed a vision for inclusion in God's designed plan for ministry. Socially conscious ministry via community engagement can significantly and positively impact the church's visibility and viability in a community. A church struggling with growth and development issues can experience a remarkable turnaround with the proper research tools and vision, which should be shared.

**Works Cited**

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