# TEACH A CHILD TO FISH: HOW ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP MIGHT TRANSFORM LOCAL CHURCH MISSION

by

James Samuel Goodlet III

A DOCTORAL PAPER

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF PITTSBURGH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

2025

*Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day.*

*Teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.*

Chinese Proverb

***Table of Contents***

Acknowledgments…… pg. 4

Abstract…… pg. 6

Teach a Child to Fish: An Introduction…… pg. 7

Chapter 1 – Troubling the Waters:
Troup County, LaGrange, and First Presbyterian Church…… pg. 14

Chapter 2 – Fishing Guides: Heifetz, Linsky, Acts of the Apostles,
and Adaptive Leadership Within the Church…… pg. 41

Chapter 3 – Reading the River: Conversations on Childcare…… pg. 61

Chapter 4 – Filling Our Reservoirs…… pg. 77

Works Cited…… pg. 88

***Acknowledgments***

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge the seven courageous women who participated in this project – and the many families out there who are fighting the very same battles as they. If nothing else, I hope this project and the work we will do moving forward makes you feel seen and heard. I would also like to thank the many people who provided so much in the way of support over these last years. To the faculty of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, thank you for your wisdom and insight. To Dr. Mary Sue Dreier, I could not have finished this race without your constant and abiding encouragement. To Dr. Jerome Creach, thank you for your feedback that served to sharpen and improve this project and the research behind it. To Shannon Johnson, thank you for the much-needed assistance with the history and context of LaGrange and Troup County. To Holly Roberts and Nicole Kennedy, thank you for connecting me with the wonderful people who were willing to share their experiences in the world of early childhood education. To the congregants of First Presbyterian Church of LaGrange, thank you for granting me permission to pursue this degree and for your willingness to join in God's adaptive mission. To my colleagues at the church, thank you for cheering me on throughout this whole process, for answering phone calls and texts when I had questions, and for covering for me when I was away on this journey. To Kristin Kirby and Tasha Owens, thank you for your fearless and faithful work with our community's children; it does not go overlooked. To those of you who volunteered to help, to read, and to bring me Fruity Pebbles and Sour Patch Kids while I was finishing up this thesis (Lennice Parker), your thoughtfulness means all the world to me. To my classmates and fellow revolutionaries in the Risking Faithfully cohort, thanks for the laughs, the tears, the

GroupMe messages, the good food, the abundant drink, and the faithful camaraderie during these crazy four years. Viva! To my dog Maddie, thank you for curling up next to me while I hammered away at the keyboard. And, most importantly, to my family – thank you for giving me the time and space to do this work. Sam and Louise – as you have requested, now that this thing is over, I promise I'll play more games of "Pig." Margaret – I love you. Thanks for everything, always.

***Abstract***

First Presbyterian Church (FPC) and its on-site preschools are facing an adaptive challenge. A lack of space limits the number of student seats available, while tuition costs restrict access to families able to afford sky-high rates. Meanwhile, childcare teachers are paid low salaries for their services, and children living in poverty fall farther and farther behind. Such a challenge threatens not only a child's livelihood, but also the congregation's vision "that all may know God's love." This project will examine how the principles of adaptive leadership might reframe the congregation's missiological understanding and practices via the work of education.

***Teach A Child to Fish: An Introduction***

The sun is high and hot at Camp Viola in LaGrange, and there is nary a cloud in the sky. Per tradition, First Presbyterian Church (FPC) is in the throes of its annual tradition hosting community children for whom summer camp is not an affordable option. It's Wednesday; the schedule dictates that, on this particular afternoon, we will be fishing, and I have been assigned the role of guide. In July. In Georgia. During the most oppressive portion of the day. I am not thrilled.

Still, we press on: hand to worm, worm to hook, hook and worm to water. My student is a late-elementary-aged girl who has never used a Zebco rod and reel. Nor has she, for that matter, ever fished. "The key," I note, "is to not let go of the button until you're ready to send the line out into the water." I show her once how to do it and reel in; the next turn is hers. The rod goes back, level with her waist, her eyes fully trained on the end of her line. Button down, she shoots the rod forward, releases pressure from her right thumb, and out goes the line twenty yards in front of us. "If nothing else," I think to myself, "she now knows how to cast a line."

Except that isn't all. On her first cast, the bobber goes immediately underneath the water. "Lift!" I scream, perhaps overzealously. She obliges and immediately the end of her rod bends dramatically toward the water. "Reel! Reel!" I encourage her. She cranks and cranks with a mixture of pride, shock, and glee. "I got one! I got one!" she yells so all of the other campers can hear. In a matter of an instant, the fish wriggles and writhes before our very eyes on the bank of the lake, and the child's spirit soars.

The saying goes, "Give a man [sic] a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." The phrase emphasizes the significance of

empowering people with knowledge and expertise, of equipping individuals with the ability to think for themselves. It speaks to the importance of teaching, instructing, and preparing human beings for whatever lies ahead. While giving one a fish might satisfy a hungry belly – if only temporarily – teaching a person to fish grants them the capability to feed themselves and others throughout the years to come.

At its core, the proverb is one about education. Yet in LaGrange, Georgia – like much of the rest of the country – the reservoirs are drying up. "Fishing lessons" at local childcare facilities are not only very much in demand, but they are incredibly difficult to find. Routinely, a lack of available childcare is listed as one of the primary obstacles that LaGrange and Troup County residents – particularly residents living in poverty – have to navigate when it comes to improving their quality of life.[1]

Meanwhile, situated in the heart of downtown LaGrange, FPC boasts a robust history of providing high-quality education for children six weeks of age through kindergarten. Founded in 1976, FPC Montessori provides a part-weekday, school-calendar-year-based toddler, preschool, and kindergarten experience for children between the ages of 18 months and 6 years. Additionally, the church opened a full-year, full-day (eleven hours, Monday through Friday) program – the FPC Childcare Center – in 1998. Meaning, on any given weekday between August and June (as both the Childcare and the Montessori are located on the FPC campus), there are approximately 150 children ages kindergarten and younger filling the hallways and classrooms of the church. These schools have not only produced children well-prepared for elementary school, but they

[1] Bellwether Education Partners, *Callaway Foundation Education Grantmaking Strategy* (Boston: Bellwether, 2023), 19. According to a study conducted by national non-profit Bellwether in 2023, Troup County has a significant gap in childcare availability, with a maximum licensed capacity of 2,518 children at childcare centers, despite having 4,263 children aged 0-5 years.

also have established a pipeline of parents and students streaming from the schools to congregational involvement within the church.

Still, in spite of its well-documented history of success and a demonstrated investment in early childhood education, something seems amiss at FPC. Currently, the church facility is maxed out spatially, meaning both the Montessori and Childcare have substantial waiting lists. Simultaneously, rising costs and rising expenses have led to rises in tuition, such that only a select portion of the population can pay to attend the schools. Meanwhile, FPC teachers are paid low salaries for their services, thus yielding significant potential for high turnover and low morale among the staff.[2] The net effect is schools like those at FPC attend mainly to the "haves" while the "have nots" fall farther and farther behind, as quality childcare remains a vital need in our country and our community.[3]

Put bluntly, the model at FPC needs revisiting, lest the church only exacerbate the already-existing educational, economic, and quality of life gaps between those able and those unable to send their children to schools like those on the church's campus. This situation represents what scholars Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky describe as an

---

[2] Bellwether, 24. According to the Bellwether analysis, "The 2019 median hourly wage of $9.37 for GA's child care workers ranked 46th out of the 50 U.S. states plus Washington D.C." First Presbyterian Childcare workers are currently paid between $10.00 to $13.50 per hour.

[3] Understandably, terms like "quality childcare" or "high-quality childcare" might seem tenuous or relative. For the purposes of this project, these phrases will be defined according to a rubric utilized by the state of Georgia. The state evaluates childcare according to a scale of quality rating (i.e., a star rating). At this point, FPC Childcare is one of only sixteen early childhood centers in the area (out of 39 within a five-mile radius) to receive a quality star rating from the state. While FPC Montessori is not eligible for star rating due to being a private preschool with exemptions, it has received accreditation for the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten programs from the state of Georgia as a quality-care facility. Incidentally, tuition rates for FPC schools are among the more expensive options for full- or part-day services in the community.

*adaptive challenge*. Put succinctly, Heifetz and Linsky describe technical problems as those for which an organization or community already knows the solutions. That is to say, the "know-how and procedures"[4] have already been deliberated and discovered. Sometimes, however, problems arise that cannot be addressed by mere cookie-cutter responses or tried-and-true methodologies; the problems, in and of themselves, require paradigm shifts demanding evolution and reformation. These are what Heifetz and Linsky describe as adaptive challenges, which "require experiments, new discoveries, and adjustments from numerous places in the organization or community."[5] A crucible of leadership, therefore, is delineating between the problems requiring technical solutions and those necessitating adaptive change. In fact, Heifetz and Linsky note, "the single most common source of leadership failure we've been able to identify – in politics, community life, business, or the nonprofit sector – is that people, especially those in positions of authority, treat adaptive challenges like technical problems."[6]

I believe FPC and its constituent schools are facing an adaptive challenge. The older ways bolstered by technical solutions have propagated an ecosystem wherein the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. We must establish a new model yielding greater accessibility for all of the area's children while better supporting those offering their lives in service to their students.

By drawing upon the precepts and wisdom of adaptive leadership, this project will consider how God might be calling FPC of LaGrange, Georgia to a new educational

---

[4] Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Change* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2017), 26.

[5] Heifetz and Linsky, 26.

[6] Ibid.

mission wholly accessible to all families within our community. Specifically, the work of Heifetz and Linsky, alongside the missiological insight of Craig Van Gelder, Dwight Zscheile, and Tod Bolsinger, and gleanings from the book of Acts, will inform and shed light upon a series of interviews with those for whom affordable, high-quality childcare is unrealistic or untenable. It is my belief and hope that this work will produce a way forward yielding new insights, bold practices, and a reframed missiology for FPC's educational ministries.

The first chapter of this thesis will describe and unpack the context within and surrounding FPC of LaGrange, Georgia. Specifically, this section will detail how the existence of historic, inherited poverty and the widespread need for childcare in our community are directly tied to one another.

The second chapter will then begin with a summation of Heifetz and Linsky's work on adaptive challenges and adaptive leadership. From there, drawing upon insights from Van Gelder, Zscheile, and Bolsinger, and readings from the book of Acts, I will consider the theological and missiological implications of adaptive leadership and how those implications might affect FPC's educational mission and praxis.

The third chapter will center around a series of qualitative interviews with people in the community for whom quality childcare, at this point, is either financially burdensome or untenable. This is where the proverbial "rubber will meet the road," as the interviews will seek to discern the feasibility of and desire for a fully accessible (in terms of location, tuition, and calendar/schedule) downtown community childcare center. My hypothesis is that this adaptive moment must be met by a new model for early childhood education in our city and county, perhaps to the extent of a sliding scale tuition or

potentially-fully-free (depending upon income eligibility) childcare facility. However, the need for interviews underscores an important presumption: that it is imperative such a model not be shaped solely by the establishing entity – in this case, a White, middle-upper class, downtown congregation like FPC – without significant input and ownership from the communities for whom the school would be expanded or re-created.

The fourth and final chapter will analyze the responses in light of Heifetz and Linsky's scholarship – alongside that of Van Gelder, Zscheile, and Bolsinger, and the book of Acts – to determine and identify: the true nature of the adaptive challenge and if that challenge aligns with what I initially believed it to be; the kind of response the identified adaptive challenge requires and what that response entails; the level of interest and energy within the community to meet the adaptive moment; and potential ways forward for our community and congregation in light of the research.

Finally, a note about intent. In their book *Leading Faithful Innovation: Following God into a Hopeful Future*, Zscheile, Michael Binder, and Tessa Pinkstaff note the import of asking "God questions" instead of "church questions."[7] Borrowing from pastor, teacher, and writer Alan Roxburgh, the authors describe church questions as the following: "How can we get more people to join our church? How can our church meet a need in the neighborhood? How can we attract more young families?"[8] While these questions are understandable, the authors note their tendency "to default toward a posture of fixing the church. Our focus becomes centered on what we can do to sustain or grow

---

[7] Michael Binder, Tessa Pinkstaff, and Dwight Zscheile, *Leading Faithful Innovation: Following God into a Hopeful Future* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2023), 7.

[8] Ibid.

the church as an institution. God's role tends to drop out of view."[9] Additionally, with such a church-centered perspective, "neighbors can easily become abstractions… rather than actual people with whom we have relationships and whose stories we know."[10] God questions, on the other hand, offer a different line of inquiry. They ask, "What might God be up to in the lives of our neighbors? Where has God been present in the history of our congregation? How might the Spirit be moving in the lives of our church's members or calling us to join God's work in the neighborhood?"[11]

The aim of this study is not to grow FPC of LaGrange or to expand *our* mission in the hopes of expanding *our* membership. This cannot be a project undertaken for the purpose of fielding "church questions." Instead, the intent is to discern how God might be calling our congregation to join in the work God is already birthing and accomplishing within our community. The ministry here must be God-centered and God's-people-centered as, together by the Spirit's lead and urging, we participate in the liberative mission God has already inaugurated via the work of early childhood education.

Put another way, we join God in the work of teaching to fish. We join God in maintaining, sustaining, and creating the reservoirs around and in which we gather. We join God in this vocation on the water's edge, empowering, equipping, and educating: hand to worm, worm to hook, hook and worm to water.

---

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Binder, Pinkstaff, and Zscheile, 8.

## *Chapter 1 – Troubling the Waters: Troup County, LaGrange, and First Presbyterian Church*

On a cold, blustery January day in western Georgia, weather reports are calling for a chance of snow and ice, a rarity for this part of the world. Shortly before 8:00 am, I receive a text from a woman I am slated to interview. She is in tears.

> Good morning Pastor James. I hope we can find a solution to childcare because it's so hard. I can't even go to work due to not having [anybody to] keep my daughter & it's frustrating. [The] daycare she was going to just cost too much for her age. It's $170 a WEEK for her & me & her father… I just recently started back working; it's been tight for us & she's been at home. And whenever I applied her for CAPS,[12] she always got denied, which if she got approved would take a huge load off, but to apply for CAPS it's way different now. You have to be qualified & be a part of specific groups. I didn't understand & my ma didn't either. They've changed it. Now you have to do interviews & stuff that I don't even remember you having to do to apply for CAPS. It was simple. So I'm trying to see if a family member could keep [my daughter] while I go to work this morning but it looks like everybody is either working or can't watch her. Which brings me to missing work. I just hope & pray there's a solution because it's ridiculous how much you have to pay for daycare.[13]

It is a heartbreaking text to be sure, if not an altogether unsurprising one. There has been no shortage of literature or discussion surrounding what has been frequently described as a crisis within United States childcare. A 2023 article in *Forbes* magazine states, "According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, as many as 100,000 Americans have been forced to stay home from work each month because of child care problems. The economic toll now amounts to $122 billion each year in lost earnings, productivity, and revenue."[14] Frequently, political leaders bemoan a lack of universal access to childcare

---

[12] The Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program administered through the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL). This program assists low-income families with the cost of childcare.

[13] Edited for punctuation and clarity.

[14] Maria Flynn, "U.S. Child Care Crisis Is Holding Back The Workforce," *Forbes*, November 3, 2023,

and note the country's failure to provide what many deem a right as opposed to a privilege.

Yet, in spite of a sense of urgency driving conversations at national, state, and local levels, families still struggle to secure spots for their children or to afford spaces when they are able to find them. During a recent hallway conversation with the FPC Childcare Director, I asked how many times she fields calls from individuals in the community needing a place for their child. She described a phone conversation she had that morning with a gentleman whose spouse had been injured and was unable to take care of their child that day. He asked if there were any spots available – of which there were none – so he could go to work. "That kind of thing happens at least twice a week," the Director noted. Without knowing the specifics, one can imagine the family's plight, if only because the story is so common: without adequate care for their child, the man would have to skip work. Without work, there would be no payment for the day's services; there would also be the risk of repercussions from the employer for not showing up. There could even be a loss of a job. Meanwhile, the child who fails to receive consistent care also fails to receive the benefits of formalized early childhood education, thus creating the potential for them not to be adequately prepared for pre-kindergarten or kindergarten.

At issue here isn't whether or not there is a problem; at issue is why this problem exists in the first place. What fostered the conditions poisoning the reservoir in this community, and how might God be at work troubling those very waters? Look upstream and you'll find: the answer is complicated.

---

https://www.forbes.com/sites/mariaflynn/2023/11/02/us-child-care-crisis-is-holding-back-the-workforce/.

This chapter will offer a historical overview of Troup County and LaGrange – a history which predated the colonization of the area by White settlers. While the formal establishment of the county and city represented a source of pride for the European-descended transplants, it came at a cost: the expulsion of the indigenous Creek tribes and the forced labor of Black slaves. These original sins rooted in White power and White oppression still leave their mark to this day, with the local White population still controlling a significant (if not a majority) amount of the region's wealth. To be clear, what is at stake here is nothing less than White privilege, and while that phrase is laden with potency, baggage, and even cliché, it is critical to establish the pervasiveness of that privilege and its link to the present-day context wherein people of color – namely the local Black residents – struggle to escape the bonds of poverty. Building on this critical link, the chapter will then explore the connection between race, socioeconomics, and education – specifically, early childhood education. Ultimately, the chapter will pose the question of just how a White, middle- to upper-class congregation with its own history of racially-shaped practices might navigate these dynamics in charting the course for a new educational mission accessible to all people.

*Troup County and LaGrange, Georgia*

It had been a long road to December 16, 1828 when, in the piedmont of western Georgia near what is now the state line of Alabama, the city of LaGrange was formally incorporated and named the county seat of Troup County.[15] Troup County, named for Georgia Governor George M. Troup, had already been established by that point. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the acquisition of the land came at a cost – most notably that of the

[15] Julia Traylor Dyar, *Remembering LaGrange: Musings from America's Greatest Little City* (Charleston: The History Press, 2011), 13.

welfare of local indigenous tribes. In 1821, the First Treaty of Indian Springs was forged between the Creek Nation and the federal government of the United States. This, notes author William W. Winn, was the continuance of a trend.

> [By] 1825 the eastern boundary of the Creek Nation had been in steady retrograde for nearly a hundred years, each retreat established by treaty and fixed on one of Georgia's numerous south-flowing rivers… Finally, in the Treaty of Indian Springs of 1821 it retreated yet again, this time to the Flint River, where it rested, uneasily… Georgians, of course, did not view this mobile boundary as retreating, the way the Indians did, but as an advance of the frontier.[16]

While the territory was ceded to the United States for a $200,000 fee, the Creek Nation, threatened by the prospect of further land loss, swore off any further sales to the fledgling country. Unfortunately for them, that promise proved only fleeting as the United States, again acting on behalf of the state of Georgia, returned for more land in 1825. Winn paints a vivid picture of the contentious proceedings.

> Troup, whose vehement views on state rights all but determined his every decision as Georgia's chief executive, was involved in a long-running battle with President John Quincy Adams over the removal of the Cherokee and Creek Indians from Georgia. In early February 1825, with the help of his half-Creek cousin William McIntosh, Troup had stage-managed the highly controversial 1825 Treaty of Indian Springs. With this document, McIntosh and Troup had conspired to convince a handful of compliant Lower Creek headmen to surrender all of the remaining Creek land in Georgia and a considerable portion of that in northern Alabama. The Creeks were to receive an equal number of acres of land in Indian Territory across the Mississippi River in what is now Oklahoma, plus four hundred thousand dollars to those Indians who willingly emigrated. The fifth article of the treaty stipulated that half of those funds were to be paid directly to the McIntosh party whenever they asked for it. The Creeks were to be out of Georgia no later than 1 September 1826. Although the treaty had been approved by the US Senate and signed by newly-sworn President Adams on 7 March 1825, by mid-March claims that the treaty was fraudulent were already circulating in the highest circles of Washington. Only a handful of lower Creek chiefs and no Upper Creek chiefs had signed the treaty, and only eight of the fifty-six towns in the Creek Nation had been represented at the negotiations. The majority of the Creeks were said to be outraged over the treaty. Nevertheless, Governor Troup had issued a proclamation on March 21… announcing ratification of the Treaty of Indian

[16] William W. Winn, *The Triumph of the Ecunnau-Nuxulgee* (Macon: Mercer, 2015), 12.

> Springs by the US Senate and ordering that all persons stay out of the ceded territory until the Creeks could be removed according to the terms of the treaty.[17]

Approximately the time the Treaty of Indian Springs was being brokered, the Revolutionary War hero, the Marquis de Lafayette, toured the state of Georgia. His impressions of the western Georgia environs reminded him of his home estate, LaGrange, in France. After some debate as to the location of the new county seat in 1828, LaGrange – named in honor of the Marquis – was formally incorporated and installed at the center of the county.[18] According to Clifford Lewis Smith's 1933 work, *The History of Troup County*, once the city and county were established, growth naturally followed. "Many of the settlers were people of education and property, and they brought with them tools, cattle, slaves and household furnishings. Almost immediately they began to plan for schools and churches."[19] Included among those congregations: the LaGrange Presbyterian Church, formed with 14 charter members on March 21, 1829, which shared a facility on the corner of Bull and Broome Streets with the local Baptists.

It did not take long for Troup County and its county seat to thrive. In their book *Images of America: Troup County*, authors Clark Johnson, Glenda Major, and Kaye Minchew note, "Rich soil and fertile waterways made the gently rolling Piedmont

---

[17] Winn, 22. Indian Springs 1825 accelerated Troup's eviction of the Creek Nation, even though President Adams considered the treaty to be invalid. Adams brokered a subsequent treaty in Washington that was much friendlier to the Creeks, much to Troup's chagrin. The tension between Troup and Adams very nearly grew to the point of civil war, with Georgia state militia prepared to fight the American military. Adams, however, did not want war and eventually backed away. Resultantly, the Creeks were forcibly removed from Georgia by 1827. On a related note, due to the role he played in ceding Creek lands, McIntosh was executed by the Creek Nation in April 1825.

[18] To this day, a statue of Lafayette occupies a central place in the city square.

[19] Ibid.

foothills an ideal place for raising all manner of grains. Cotton, hogs, and cattle played important roles, too. Troup County was the fourth wealthiest county in Georgia in 1860, based on taxes paid to the state."[20] Yet, as was the case with the settling of Troup County and the subsequent expulsion of indigenous peoples, there was a seedy side to this affluence. In his *New Georgia Encyclopedia* article on the region, Johnson notes, "Antebellum Troup County was the fourth-wealthiest in Georgia and fifth-largest slaveholding county. Enslaved laborers – skilled artisans, craftsmen, and engineers – provided the basis of that wealth and the labor to tame the frontier quickly."[21] Local homes and plantations going by the name of Bellevue and Nutwood – both of which still stand today – were among the many Federal and Greek revival style mansions erected to house wealthy citizenry, all the while their money was earned on the backs of slave labor working in the area's fields.

As LaGrange grew, so, too, did its prowess as a center for education. As Johnson describes, "The first school, Troup County Academy for boys, was followed by three female colleges: LaGrange, Southern, and Brownwood… Two high schools were opened in the 1860s for Black students. Built on land and with materials and money donated by former slave owners, they eventually merged into the public school system."[22] Though

---

[20] Forrest Clark Johnson III, Glenda Ralston Major, and Kaye Lanning Minchew, *Images of America: Troup County* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2007), 7.

[21] Forrest Clark Johnson III, "LaGrange," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, July 12, 2022. https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/counties-cities-neighborhoods/lagrange

[22] Ibid.

not all of the schools survived, LaGrange's reputation as an "Educational Center"[23] remained intact as the turn of the 20th century loomed.[24]

Yet, as the city and region experienced growth, the specter of war hung over the country. When Union and Confederate armies assembled their troops, citizens of LaGrange were quick to respond. Notes Johnson, "During the Civil War (1861-65) more than eight companies of men left LaGrange for the various fronts. Militia and state guards also saw duty, some at Chickamauga, others along the Atlanta and West Point railroads, and some in minor battles, such as Philpot's Ferry and Fort Tyler, in Troup County."[25] A well-known company of female soldiers, dubbed the Nancy Harts after the Revolutionary War heroine, also took to fighting to protect the home front. Hospitals were established in LaGrange; Confederate president Jefferson Davis frequented the city. On April 17, 1865, as the end of war was drawing near, a Union battalion besieged the city, led by (interestingly enough) Colonel Oscar H. LaGrange. The battle burned factories, demolished stores, and destroyed the local railroad depot, train tracks, and telegraph lines.[26] The Civil War had left its mark; the future of the once blossoming city seemed uncertain.

Emerging from war, however, LaGrange underwent something of a renaissance due to its successful investment in textiles during what is called the New South era. By

---

[23] Dyar, 15.

[24] Dyar, 15. Citing the May 1895 edition of *Southern Cultivator*, the author notes LaGrange's description as a "beautiful little educational and manufacturing city" with people "educated, refined and progressive."

[25] Johnson, "LaGrange."

[26] Johnson, "LaGrange."

the turn of the 20th century, mills were being constructed to house a growing cotton industry; city life largely reoriented itself around communal mill villages featuring homes, stores, and schools. Railroads returned to town; public schools were introduced; hospitals were constructed. The effort was largely spearheaded by local businessmen Cornelius V. and James G. Truitt, Joseph E. and O. A. Dunson, and, most notably, Fuller E. Callaway.[27]

A Troup County native, Callaway began his life in commerce as a small business entrepreneur. Callaway utilized his savings accrued as a young man to open a dry goods outlet, which he grew into the largest department store in town (aptly named the Callaway Department Store). After franchising the store to various locations, Callaway expanded his commercial portfolio by investing in LaGrange's first cotton mill in 1895.[28] From there, Callaway built a textile empire entailing multiple mills that not only buttressed his family with significant wealth, but also provided a philanthropic means through which the community could grow and thrive. As Johnson, Major, and Minchew describe, under Callaway's lead, the "major textile companies, which provided many amenities for their employees and families, soon began assisting the general public with schools, churches, parks, and in other ways."[29]

Callaway was widely perceived as more than just a businessman; he was a staunch advocate for the thriving of his community. The Foundation website bearing his

---

[27] Ibid.

[28] Kaye Lanning Minchew, "Callaway Family," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, December 29, 2014. https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/callaway-family/

[29] Johnson et al, 7.

name writes, “Under his leadership and by his encouragement, the mills hired nurses and established medical clinics. The mills brought in dentists and set up dental chairs for the children in the schools. Pastures were fenced-in and any workman could buy a cow, payable by the week and without interest. Mr. Callaway even provided money for funeral expenses for those who needed such help.”[30] Regarding his life’s vocation, Callaway once famously and paternalistically described his business as “making American citizens and running cotton mills to pay expenses.”[31]

Yet, like the history of the community he knew and loved, Callaway’s legacy is complicated. The mills he owned and operated were staunchly segregated. Notes author Arden Williams:

> For African Americans, life in the Jim Crow South meant limited job opportunities. The textile industry in Georgia was strictly segregated; Black male workers held only menial jobs at the factories and were not permitted to live within the mill villages. Black women had virtually no role in mill work before the 1950s. They were employed by mill families to cook, clean, and watch the younger children in the mill village. In an industry that often struggled to remain solvent, [W]hite workers viewed the possibility of Black mill employment as a threat to their jobs, and, in turn, intimidated African Americans.[32]

Relatedly, a series of philanthropic institutions beginning in 1913 with the LaGrange Settlement formalized the commitment of Fuller E. Callaway, Sr. to the welfare of his employees. One of those institutions came to be known as the Callaway Educational Association (CEA), established in 1944 to encompass the work of the old Southwest LaGrange YMCA and other Callaway Mills sponsored programs. Originally intended

---

[30] Fuller E. Callaway Foundation. “History and Heritage.” https://www.callawayfoundation.org/history.php

[31] Ibid.

[32] Arden Williams, “Textile Industry,” *New Georgia Encyclopedia,* October 5, 2007. https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/business-economy/textile-industry/

only for the families of Callaway Mills employees, CEA membership was soon opened to the community at large. However, it is well-known within the community that the CEA was not really intended for the community at large; rather, it was restricted primarily to the White population of LaGrange and Troup County. While the local school began the process of integration in the mid-1960's, the CEA did not cease operation until May 31, 1992, when many of its assets were donated to LaGrange College. Even until its closure approaching the end of the 20th century, the CEA was notorious for not being hospitable to people of color.

Though the Callaway legacy is no doubt complicated by racially-influenced practices, the family's benevolence to the community has lived on. While one son, Fuller Jr., continued his father's work and philanthropy through the textile industry, the other son, Cason, founded what remains a boon for local tourism, Callaway Gardens. Callaway Mills eventually sold to Deering-Milliken Company in 1968, and while that transaction altered the course of LaGrange history, the Callaway Foundation – established and known as the Textile Benefit Foundation in 1919 and subsequently as the Callaway Community Foundation in 1943 – would carry the family's legacy of philanthropy into the future. To this day, the Callaway Foundation continues to fund education initiatives, capital builds (including church-related projects), economic revitalization efforts, and philanthropic causes that, in the Foundation's words, "make Troup County a great place to live for all of its residents."[33]

The Callaway influence, however, extends well beyond the millions of dollars the family and the foundation have poured into the community. The Callaways – and their

[33] Callaway Foundation Inc., "Early Beginnings of the Foundation," https://www.callawayfoundation.org/early_beginnings.php. For reference, as of September 30, 2023, Callaway reported assets of $252,559,559.

descendants, the Hudsons – have inspired a culture of benevolent giving throughout the area, with a significant number of non-profit organizations and faith-based communities standing as the beneficiaries. Additionally, the family's – and indeed the city's – history of capitalizing on opportunity continues to leave its mark. Multiple times throughout its existence – be it during the post-Civil War Reconstruction period, the Great Depression, the decline of mill-centered life, or even the global pandemic of 2020 – LaGrange and Troup County have been faced with significant threats demanding evolution and adaptation. The community could have folded on any number of occasions, but it refused. Instead, it pivoted toward that which would define the region moving forward. In the 1800s, it was toward an emphasis on education and agriculture; at the turn of the 20th century, it was toward cotton and textiles. After Callaway Mills' sale and departure, Troup County and LaGrange made another dramatic shift: this time toward manufacturing and technology.

A mere forty-five-minute drive to the world's busiest airport, Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson International, LaGrange in many ways serves as a "bedroom community for the big city." This certainly aided the area during the pandemic, as people flocked to LaGrange due to its proximity to the airport and its relatively low cost of living. However, prior to the pandemic – in the decades following the closure of multiple Callaway mills – the area became a player in the Georgia industrial scene, boasting the presence of a number of international companies, including Kia Georgia and its various suppliers, Walmart, Duracell, and Kimberly Clark Corporation. In fact, LaGrange is home to more Fortune 500 regional sites per capita than any other city in the country.[34]

[34] LaGrange Troup County Chamber of Commerce, "Economic Development." https://www.lagrangechamber.com/work/economic-development/.

With the upcoming arrival of an inland train port directly linking the community to Savannah's harbor, Troup County and LaGrange are currently fielding offers from a significant number of manufacturing and technological giants interested in relocating to the region. Educationally, Troup County and LaGrange center around a public school system drawing the benevolent support of the Callaway Foundation, a growing liberal arts college, and a technical school. Additionally, the region boasts a burgeoning arts scene with a variety of museums, an amphitheater, and a full-sized symphony orchestra. There is also a developing tourism industry centering around a 25,864-acre lake, multiple sports tournament host sites, and a well-known national water park franchise, Great Wolf Lodge. Add in a robust food and beverage culture home to a number of breweries and eateries, and you have a city of 30,000 poised for growth as Atlanta continues to spread its tentacles outward.

Yet, even though the community has considerable successes to stand upon, 200 years of forward movement has no doubt come at a very steep price. Indeed, the marginalization and elimination of indigenous life and the dependence upon slave labor have bestowed upon LaGrange and Troup County their own version of original sins. Those transgressions subsequently left stains upon 19th- and 20th-century life with the dawn of Jim Crow legislation during the post-Civil War New South, resulting in segregation, disenfranchisement, and murderous lynchings.[35] Even today, a monument

[35] Equal Justice Initiative, "Lynching in America." https://lynchinginamerica.eji.org/explore. According to the Equal Justice Initiative, there were three lynchings in Troup County between 1877 and 1950.

honoring Confederate soldiers organized and spearheaded by the United Daughters of the Confederacy in the early 1900's still stands at the edge of downtown LaGrange.[36]

The city and county are quick to point to progress in the areas of equity and social justice. In 2017, for instance, then police chief Lou Dekmar offered a formal apology for the 1940 lynching of Austin Callaway. That apology, alongside the advocacy of local leadership, dotted national headlines and spurred the creation of Racial Trustbuilding Incorporated, an organization dedicated to conversations about race between people of different races.

LaGrange has also proudly boasted the accomplishments of numerous local citizens of color. For instance, Horace King, a freed slave who became a master bridge builder and legislator in the state of Alabama, ultimately settled in LaGrange in 1872, after which he and his family played a pivotal leadership role in the local construction industry. He is buried alongside his son and a replica of one of his bridges in LaGrange at the Mulberry Street Cemetery.[37] Lucy Miller Morgan, born a slave in 1859, served as a well-known businesswoman in the late 1800's-early 1900's and nurse in the office of Dr. Benjamin T. Wood, a Black physician in LaGrange. The Rev. Dr. Otis Moss, Jr., a LaGrange native and well known activist in the Civil Rights Movement, began his

---

[36] In 2020, as Confederate monuments were being torn down throughout the southern United States, then mayor of LaGrange Jim Thornton was forced to make a decision regarding the statue. A 2019 state Senate bill signed by Governor Brian Kemp made it difficult to remove or relocate Confederate monuments. As a result, the mayor conceded that the statue would remain in place; however, he also recommended signage be placed near the statue describing the memorial's history and the ugly period it references. Unfortunately, signage was never added.

[37] Mulberry Street Cemetery, where King is buried, is now being restored and transformed into an educational and historical landmark commemorating King's life and the lives of those beneath hundreds of marked and unmarked graves adjacent to his final resting place.

ministerial career in the area before co-pastoring Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta with Dr. Martin Luther King, Sr. The first known school for Black students began in 1865; it came to be known as LaGrange Academy, which would merge with the public schools in 1903 when the LaGrange system was established. The first Black fair ever held in America took place in LaGrange in 1878. When local White industrialist and philanthropist Joseph Dunson supplied LaGrange the money to build its first public hospital in 1916, he explicitly stated it must serve both Black and White patients.

While there has been progress when it comes to civil rights, that forward momentum, more often than not, has encountered more than its fair share of inertia and yielded more than its fair share of complexity. Shortly after he was elected LaGrange's first Black mayor in March 2023, the late Rev. Dr. Willie Edmondson conducted an interview with FPC's podcast ministry, *Lewis and Broad Media*. During that conversation, the mayor discussed his own experiences growing up in the area.

> Racism was out in the open. I remember going into the Kress Building, and I was taught to read when I was four years old, and I saw this sign above this water fountain that said "Colored Water" and "White Water." And I said to my grandmother, "How does this White water taste?" She said, "Let's see how it tastes." So she lifted me up on a stool and I drank a sip of water, and there was a lady that was in the store that was very nasty. She said, "You know better than to drink out of that fountain. Your fountain is over there." So I discovered then what racism was all about.[38]

Edmondson continues later in the interview.

> I was about 14 years old. They had forced integration in 1970, where our school was being taken from us and we were having to go to Troup High School, which was forced integration from the federal government. And we went to Troup High School, but in the meantime, they were taking the name of our school off: Ethel

---

[38] "Dr. Willie Edmondson." Produced by Leighton Parker. *Lewis and Broad Media*, November 3, 2023. https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/s6-e4-dr-willie-edmondson-mayor-of-lagrange/id1538796578?i=1000633627640

> W. Kight.[39] Mrs. Kight was such a wonderful person for education… All of this was devastating to us because she had contributed so much to education, and they were taking her name off the school, not because they wanted a better name. It was because her name was that of a Black lady, and the White children didn't want to go to a school with the name of Black woman on it. They didn't realize how important she was to us. So a couple of guys, along with myself, organized a walk-out, a march, and we marched all the way from Ethel Kight down to the courthouse steps to protest the name being taken off our school. It was quite heartbreaking that day – in 1969-70… Some of the merchants heard that we were coming, so some of them closed their stores. Others came out to look at us because they heard a mob was coming downtown. We marched very quietly, all the way downtown, in an orderly fashion… got on the courthouse steps and made our protests there.[40]

In many ways, Dr. Edmondson's story is emblematic of Black experience in Troup County and LaGrange. While there was undoubtedly forward movement during the course of his life, culminating in his election as mayor shortly before his death, there was also heartache and heartbreak, not to mention physical and psychological trauma he was forced to endure.[41] Even that which might be commonly considered as progress is complicated via the lens of Black experience. Dr. Edmondson lifts up the example of integration, noting the following.

> I think integration, as whole, was not a good thing for the Black community. We lost a lot in the Black community when integration came about. We had a lot of Black businesses that we lost, a lot of mom and pop stores. We lost restaurants, because at the time of segregation, we could not go and sit down at the bar [in White restaurants] and receive a hot dog or a hamburger. You had to receive your food from the back door and you had to eat it outside standing up or take it in your car and go where you had to go. When integration came about, all of that stopped. We were then permitted to go in the front doors and so the Blacks started going in front doors and they sort of weaned away from some of the restaurants

---

[39] Ethel Kight was a teacher and seminal figure in the Black education community who oversaw many changes in the local schools during the turbulent Civil Rights era. She played a central role in the process of integration.

[40] "Dr. Willie Edmondson." *Lewis and Broad Media.*

[41] In the interview, Dr. Edmondson acknowledges a number of fights in which he took part during the move to the integrated Troup High School. At the same time, he also describes that period as a "smooth transition."

> that we had been going to. Even in some cities, they had Black hotels, because hotels were not open to Black people. You had some hotels that would not allow Blacks to come. So we had our own hotels, we had our own restaurants, we had our own stores, and so naturally – it's almost like when the "big box" [stores] come in now, it runs all of the mom and pop stores out. The same thing about integration. When integration came about, it ran a lot of the small businesses out.[42]

Dr. Edmondson raises an important point: that even though watershed moments like *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 certainly represent landmark achievements for civil rights in our country, those moments do not necessarily equate to Black success.

Recent research conducted on socioeconomics and education in Troup County and LaGrange supports Dr. Edmondson's argument. United for ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) is a New Jersey-based national organization whose "research quantifies and describes the number of households that are struggling financially."[43] ALICE takes a community-by-community approach to identifying not only the exact metrics of those who live below the Federal Poverty Line (or FPL), but also those who live just above the FPL yet are unable to afford a basic cost of living. Per a nationwide study, "There were 35 million ALICE households (29%) nationwide in 2018. Combined with households below the [FPL], a total of 51 million U.S. households (42%) struggle to make ends meet."[44] More specifically for Georgia in 2022, the data showed the following:

- Of Georgia's 4,021,382 households in 2022, 13% earned below the [FPL].
- 35% [of households] were ALICE, in households that earned above the FPL but not enough to afford the basics in the communities where they

---

[42] "Dr. Willie Edmondson." *Lewis and Broad Media*.

[43] United for Alice, "About Us; Overview," https://www.unitedforalice.org/overview.

[44] United for Alice, "Meet Alice," https://www.unitedforalice.org/meet-alice.

live.

- Together, 48% of households in Georgia were below the ALICE Threshold (poverty + ALICE divided by total households).[45]

Then there is the ALICE research specifically describing Troup County. According to the 2022 point-in-time data, 33% of households within the county are ALICE households (just below the state average of 35% per county); however, 19% of households live in poverty (well above the state average of 13% per county). Meaning, an aggregate 52% of households in Troup County live at or below the ALICE threshold. In the city of LaGrange itself, that number balloons to 56%, the highest of any municipality within the county.[46]

A closer examination will not only note the presence of poverty within the community – especially within LaGrange – but will also demonstrate that the presence of poverty exists along racial lines. In 2022, for instance, out of the 9,153 Black households in Troup County, 6,700 (73.2%) of those households live below the ALICE threshold.[47] Meanwhile, out of the 14,642 White households within the county, 5,978 (40.8%) live below the ALICE threshold.[48] Additionally, the data yields the following demographic insights about Troup County:

---

[45] United for Alice, "Research Center: Georgia," https://www.unitedforalice.org/state-overview/georgia

[46] United for Alice, "Research Center: Georgia, County Reports," https://www.unitedforalice.org/county-reports/georgia

[47] Ibid. Latinx percentages are not dissimilar, though the number is far fewer. Out of the 726 households, 435 (59.9%) live at or below the ALICE threshold.

[48] Ibid. The percentage remains a significant number, yet far below the Black constituency. For information, the Asian demographic has the highest number of households living above the ALICE threshold, with 378 out of 533 (70.9%). The presence and influence of Kia and its suppliers no doubt plays a role in that statistic.

- Single or Cohabiting (no children) – 56% below ALICE
- Married (with children) – 22% below ALICE
- Single-Female-Headed (with children) – 88% below ALICE
- Single-Male-Headed (with children) – 70% below ALICE
- Under 25 householder – 92% below ALICE
- 25 to 44 householder – 52% below ALICE
- 45 to 64 householder – 51% below ALICE
- 65 Years householder – 51% below ALICE[49]

Viewed via the aggregate, the research indicates that, within Troup County, the individual or family in the community who is most at risk for being below the ALICE threshold is a Black male or female householder under the age of 25 with children.

The findings from a Callaway-funded Bellwether study align with these reports. On the heels of completing its downtown revitalization initiative, the Callaway Foundation was looking to shift its focus to the role of education in community development. Per the Bellwether document, "In 2023, Callaway's Board of Trustees and staff coalesced around a vision that 'everyone in Troup County has a quality education, good job, safe and affordable housing, engagement in the community, and what they need to flourish' and recognized that creating the conditions for flourishing must begin in the early years."[50] In order to justify that shift, Callaway needed data.

In Callaway's partnership with Bellwether, the objective was to "conduct an updated landscape analysis of Troup County that [identified] the key strengths and opportunities to improve outcomes for young children and families."[51] The process by which the study was conducted "included input from 55 internal and external

---

[49] Ibid.

[50] Bellwether, 3.

[51] Bellwether Education Partners, *Callaway Foundation Education Grantmaking Strategy Executive Summary* (Boston: Bellwether, 2023), 1.

stakeholders and desk research on key data indicators."[52] The Bellwether analysis showed the following:

- The number of available childcare seats available in the county (supply) is far less than the overall demand for childcare… Additionally, working families need flexible and evening childcare to meet their needs.

- Childcare providers in Troup County are struggling with having enough physical space to operate their programs. The county has a significant gap in childcare availability, with a maximum licensed capacity of 2,518 children at childcare centers, despite having 4,263 children aged 0-5 years.

- Providers are struggling with recruiting and retaining qualified staff because of low pay and lack of benefits. Most Georgia [Early Childhood Education] staff meet only the minimal credentialing requirements for their roles, with just 8.5% of infant and toddler teachers holding credentials specific to that age group, underscoring the need for specialized training to deliver high-quality learning experiences. The 2019 median hourly wage of $9.37 for GA's childcare workers ranked 46th out of the 50 U.S. states plus Washington D.C.

- Racial and economic gaps correlate with academic performance disparities, highlighting the need for early and focused interventions to close this gap. Three [Troup County School System, or TCSS] elementary schools had less than half of their total student population reading at grade level. Across most TCSS elementary schools there were large disparities in reading proficiency rates between race and socioeconomic status – in some cases [W]hite 3rd grade students were proficient at 2x the rate of Black students.

- Parents in Troup County experience many mental and physical health challenges that stem from a lack of access, resources, and support. On average, more women in Troup County receive little or no prenatal care than the state average. Georgia has some of the highest rates of maternal and infant mortality and morbidity in the nation and Troup County has some of the highest rates in the state.[53]

As a result of the data, Bellwether recommended a number of focus areas to close the identified gaps, including: improving accessibility and affordability of high-quality

---

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

childcare options; improving facilities for childcare options; strengthening the early education workforce; supporting a whole child (including mental and physical health) approach; supporting a community-wide focus on language and literacy (science of reading) from birth to five; and improving prenatal health supports for highest-need families.

While the raison d'être for the studies differ, viewed together the ALICE and the Bellwether analyses both make the following abundantly clear:

- that there is a prevalence of poverty within Troup County and LaGrange – particularly (but not exclusively) within the (predominantly Black) communities of color;
- that there exists a significant economic and educational gap between the White community and, in particular, the Black population of LaGrange and Troup County;
- and that the populations most at risk to live and remain in poverty have not changed since Troup County and LaGrange were founded in the 1820s. Couched in theological terms, it seems the area's original sins are stubborn to wash away.

However, the Bellwether does suggest a possible way forward in closing the gap, principally through advancing and promoting early academic interventions to level the playing field. To do that, there is a dire need to further equip and expand the childcare workforce in the area – much of which is staffed by the very people who are most at risk.

All of which begs the question: what can a church like FPC of LaGrange do to address these problems?

*First Presbyterian Church*

At the corner of Lewis and Broad Streets in downtown LaGrange, Georgia sits FPC. With approximately 550 members, the congregation is currently experiencing growth and vitality, particularly in the area of family ministry (children and students included). The church is predominantly middle- to upper-class, White, and well-educated. Worship is of the high-church (i.e., traditional) variety, the polity is bicameral, programmatic offerings are plenty, staff are ambitious, and the annual budget of approximately $1,000,000 is generously supported by the membership.

Even though FPC has a thoroughly traditional bent, the church has demonstrated a remarkable resiliency and a willingness to adapt via the unconventional, untraditional route. Although it was once stationed on what is now Church Street downtown, in 1919 the ninety-year-old congregation made the decision to move a block to the west so it could build upon land bequeathed by LaGrange citizen Laura Loyd. Then, in 1951, a nearly thirty-year-old FPC building burned to the ground, forcing the congregation to move its services immediately to LaGrange High School. Nevertheless, the church rebuilt and continued to grow, such that the Presbyterians in the 1960s bought adjacent tracts of land in case expansion was ever needed. That land was indeed developed and built upon in the 1980s with the construction of a new educational wing called the Gallant Building (named for one of FPC's more benevolent families). FPC also served as a southern trailblazer in the denomination's ordination of women, as female deacons were elected in 1973 and an elder in 1975.[54] The opening of the Montessori and Childcare schools further

[54] The first woman to be ordained in the southern Presbyterian Church, the former Presbyterian Church in the United States, was in 1965. Incidentally, FPC's 1973 ordination of women deacons occurred in the same year the Presbyterian Church in America – rooted in nearby Birmingham – broke away from the Presbyterian Church in

signified the congregation's willingness to meet a community need while taking risks missionally.[55]

However, like many longstanding southern churches, FPC is not without its share of blemishes. The 1960's, during the height of the Civil Rights Movement, marked a particularly challenging period in the life of the congregation. The following is taken from the meeting minutes of the FPC board, the Session, on May 22, 1961.

> The Moderator presented… a communication from the Stated Clerk of Presbytery [concerning] recommendations of the Church Extension Committee regarding an invitation to three (3) Negro Congregations to become a part of Atlanta Presbytery… The communication was discussed by the Session, but no action was taken.[56]

The matter does not resurface in the Session's archives until February 5, 1963, when an elder "gave a preliminary report on the visit of Presbytery's… study regarding the need and feasibility of the establishment of a Negro Presbyterian Church in LaGrange."[57] That following April, the Session came to the following conclusion: "That due to the present financial condition of this Church we do not proceed at the present time toward the

---

the United States due to, among other differences, the ordination issue.

[55] First Presbyterian Church of LaGrange Session Minutes, October 5, 1971, LaGrange, GA. As early as October 1971, Session minutes indicate interest in "a proposed project for a full time Child Care Service to be sponsored by our Church for the benefit of the LaGrange community whereby a ministry of child care would be provided to under-privileged children on a limited basis. The Session was unanimous in their approval of the project…"

[56] First Presbyterian Church of LaGrange Session Minutes, May 22, 1961, LaGrange, GA.

[57] First Presbyterian Church of LaGrange Session Minutes, February 5, 1963, LaGrange, GA.

establishment of a negro Presbyterian Church in LaGrange, GA."[58] Just four months later, the Session made an even more notable decision.

> That the policy of this Church be: If negroes present themselves to attend worship services, they be asked if they have sincerely come to worship and if so, they be seated in chairs at the back of the church by the Elders on the Welcoming Committee at the front door, and if they refuse to sit in the designated area, that they be requested to leave.[59]

In March 1964, the Session did recommend that "the LaGrange Ministerial Alliance (Negro) be permitted to meet with the LaGrange Ministerial Association (White) in our church on such occasions as the Ministerial Association may invite the Alliance to attend its meetings."[60] However, the March 1965 minutes strike a more ominous tone, when one longtime elder "submitted his resignation as a member of the Session for the reason that his views on the question of [integration] of the churches did not conform to the official view of the church as announced by the General Assembly."[61] Then, in July of that year, the Session amended an earlier policy.

> If negroes present themselves to attend worship services, they be asked if they have sincerely come to worship and if so, they be seated in chairs at the back of the Church by the Elders on the Welcoming Committee at the front door, and if

---

[58] First Presbyterian Church of LaGrange Session Minutes, April 9, 1963, LaGrange, GA.

[59] First Presbyterian Church of LaGrange Session Minutes, August 6, 1963, LaGrange, GA.

[60] First Presbyterian Church of LaGrange Session Minutes, March 26, 1964, LaGrange, GA.

[61] First Presbyterian Church of LaGrange Session Minutes, March 2, 1965, LaGrange, GA. The minutes also note "that members of the Session individually would discuss [the elder's] request with him with the hope that he will withdraw his request and that the matter be considered at a later meeting." That elder's name does appear in subsequent minutes, suggesting he was convinced to stay. Meanwhile, the denomination's progressive stance in support of civil rights during the 1960's sheds light on the elder's views.

> they refuse to sit in the designated area, that they be requested to leave, *but that no violence be exerted.*[62]

While the Session minutes make no mention of violent outbreaks on church grounds, they do paint a picture of a congregation navigating fraught times in the nation's history. Following the amendment to church policy in July 1965, however, there is no further mention of the Session discussing the racial issues of the 60's.

Instead, the minutes mark a shift from a tumultuous period in the church's life to a broadening of horizons beyond the 1960's. People of color joined the church in the 1970's. The congregation remained loyal to the denomination through the aforementioned women's ordination debates, the union of the northern and southern branches of Presbyterianism in 1983, and during the civil rights movement on behalf of the LGBTQ+ community in the 2000's. Today, FPC's missional life centers around experimental ministries like the Wednesday morning coaching and counseling initiative and a Thursday lunch program serving approximately 200 each week. In the wake of the global pandemic of 2020, the church was quick to respond with the creation of *Lewis and Broad Media*, a ministry featuring podcasts and online content geared to the congregation and community alike.

However, there is no denying that, within the church, things feel different now than they did once before. Sundays and Wednesdays no longer occupy a central place at the cultural table; numbers and participation, though increasing, are not at the same levels they were during the 1980's and 1990's; programmatic mainstays like Sunday school and the Presbyterian Women now live on the margins; congregants are even known to wear

---

[62] First Presbyterian Church of LaGrange Session Minutes, July 6, 1965, LaGrange, GA. Italics added for emphasis on the change.

jeans and bring coffee cups to worship. Accompanying that is a sense of grief, though there is a general acknowledgement that the church has to pivot – to be re-formed, as it were – in order to keep moving forward.

As a result, in 2019, the Session called together a Vision Team whose primary task would be to assess the current state of the church – both universally and locally – and to discern potential ways forward for FPC. The members of that team analyzed congregational and global trends; they considered insights like those of Phyllis Tickle and her examination of the 500-year rummage sale[63]; they even weathered a global pandemic and unpacked the effects of a worldwide shutdown upon congregations like FPC. Eventually, the Vision Team drew a number of conclusions, including:

- that the church is uniquely gifted and invested in the areas of children and youth, worship and the arts, and community formation;
- that FPC should consider missional, programmatic, and facility enhancements in alignment with these areas of strength;
- that the congregation should lean into those areas of strength as a means of differentiating FPC from the plethora of other churches in the community.

From there, the Vision Team recommended to the Session that these areas be considered as primary strategic lenses through which FPC would operate programmatically and missionally. In a particularly Presbyterian move, the Vision Team also recommended that two new groups be established to further flesh out next steps for the congregation: the Campus Task Force (CTF), whose role would be to assess current and future property

---

[63] Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012).

needs; and the Education Task Force (ETF), whose task it would be to ensure alignment between Childcare, Montessori, and FPC's children's ministries.

Notably, education is the place and space where the work of those two task forces intersect. The ETF's work has not only evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of both the Childcare and Montessori, but they also have been inspired to tackle questions related to equity, justice, accessibility, and affordability. They have researched different models, spoken with the schools' directors in order to hear their hopes and dreams, and taken seriously the emphasis the Callaway Foundation has placed on early childhood education. They have recognized the racial and economic gaps identified by the Bellwether analysis, and they have processed FPC's role in exacerbating those gaps due to exorbitant tuition rates and, in Montessori's case, limited hours.[64] They also understand FPC's position as a seat of power – with a downtown, central location, a wealthy and well-connected membership, and a predominantly White constituency. Bearing all of that in mind, the ETF is strongly considering a new model for early childhood education at FPC designed to be accessible to all segments of the community. Meanwhile, the CTF is seeking ways not only to house whatever model the ETF recommends, but also to ensure that the missional needs of that new model synergize well with the programmatic needs of the church (especially the children's ministries).

In short, FPC isn't seeking ways to expand upon what is currently happening; FPC is looking to adapt its ministry and mission to meet the adaptive challenge at hand: to answer the call for quality, affordable, accessible childcare in Troup County and LaGrange. How might we trouble those waters? Where and to whom can we look for

[64] As information, FPC Childcare currently houses 7 children who qualify for CAPS funding. However, the vast majority of families whose children attend the Childcare pay full tuition.

guidance? For that, we turn to Heifetz, Linsky, and the Acts of the Apostles in the next chapter.

## *Chapter 2 – Fishing Guides: Heifetz, Linsky, Acts of the Apostles, and Adaptive Leadership Within the Church*

Leadership is risky business. So say Heifetz and Linsky in their book *Leadership on the Line*, where they state, "To lead is to live dangerously because when leadership counts, when you lead people through difficult change, you challenge what people hold dear – their daily habits, tools, loyalties, and ways of thinking – with nothing more to offer perhaps than a possibility."[65] There comes a point – when the status quo no longer creates a tenable future, when previous ways of doing or being do not confront the challenges at hand – that a different kind of leadership is necessary. Technical know-how – expertise and well-established procedures on how to approach a given problem or situation – will not get you across the finish line because the environment in which the technical approach would have worked no longer exists. Inevitably, adaptive leadership is required.

Adaptive leadership meets challenges head on. Adaptive leadership experiments without knowing all of the answers. Adaptive leadership does not have the end in sight; there are too many detours en route to discovery. Adaptive leadership requires an open mind and a willingness to fail, to learn from one's mistakes, to stand up, and to try again. Adaptive leadership entails risk, with the reward being new practices addressing a new reality. And, say Heifetz and Linsky, adaptive leadership means loss.

> People do not resist change, per se. People resist loss. You appear dangerous to people when you question their values, beliefs, or habits of a lifetime. You place yourself on the line when you tell people what they need to hear rather than what they want to hear. Although you may see with clarity and passion a promising

[65] Heifetz and Linsky, 18.

> future of progress and gain, people will see with equal passion the losses you are asking them to sustain.[66]

Meaning, there will be resistance. There will be attempts to treat an adaptive challenge with technical solutions, to place a band-aid on a more insidious disease. There will be avoidance and pretending that the problem does not really exist. There will even be attempts to sabotage the leader.

Therefore, it is crucial for the leader to understand just how to approach adaptive challenges. For one, it is imperative that the leader not shoulder the entire burden – the entire responsibility – for whatever change is required. At some point, the work must be given to the very people it affects. Note Heifetz and Linsky, "The sustainability of change depends on having the people with the problem internalize the change itself."[67] Adaptive challenges require learning on the part of both the leader and the people who are being led. There must be individual and corporate ownership of the challenge. Furthermore, the adaptive leader must know just how hard and how fast to push. As Heifetz and Linsky have famously stated, adaptive work "creates risk, conflict, and instability because addressing the issues underlying adaptive problems may involve upending deep and entrenched norms. Thus leadership requires disturbing people – *but at a rate they can absorb.*"[68]

Additionally, Heifetz and Linsky encourage a tactic in approaching adaptive challenges they describe as "getting off the dance floor and going to the balcony."[69]

---

[66] Heifetz and Linsky, 25.

[67] Heifetz and Linsky, 26.

[68] Heifetz and Linsky, 31-32.

[69] Heifetz and Linsky, 56.

> Achieving a balcony perspective means taking yourself out of the dance, in your mind, even if only for a moment. The only way you can gain both a clearer view of reality and some perspective on the bigger picture is by distancing yourself from the fray. Otherwise, you are likely to misperceive the situation and make the wrong diagnosis, leading you to misguided decisions about whether and how to intervene.[70]

However, one does not simply stay on the balcony and observe from afar. There has to be a balance between time spent upstairs and time spent on the floor. The floor is where the leader can effect change, where they can have a role to play in the rhythm of the dance. The challenge, Heifetz and Linsky note, "is to move back and forth between the dance floor and the balcony, making interventions, observing their impact in real time, and then returning to the action."[71] This movement allows the adaptive leader to understand where people are, to discern "the song beneath the words,"[72] and to read the behavior of key figures involved in the change. The process of adaptive leadership, Heifetz and Linsky emphasize, is therefore an improvisational piece in which you move back and forth from the balcony to the dance floor without script and, sometimes, without plan.

> Sustaining your leadership, then, requires first and foremost the capacity to see what is happening to you and your initiative, as it is happening. This takes discipline and flexibility, and it is hard to do. You are immersed in the action, responding to what is right there in front of you. And when you do get some distance, you still have the challenge of accurately reading and interpreting what you now observe.[73]

How, then, does an organization recognize it is in the midst of an adaptive moment? Bolsinger, author of *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in*

---

[70] Heifetz and Linsky, 57.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Heifetz and Linsky, 59.

[73] Heifetz and Linsky, 73.

*Uncharted Territory*, offers a helpful framework. He describes adaptive leadership via the lens of an uncharted map, saying:

> Uncharted leadership therefore requires transformation of the way problems have been approached in the past since there is no map for uncharted territories. An understanding of this kind of adaptive leadership [has] three characteristics. 1) A changing environment where there is no clear answer; 2) The necessity for both leaders and [followers] to learn, especially the leader's own ongoing transformation; 3) The unavoidable reality that a new solution will result in loss.[74]

Utilizing that rubric, Tickle might suggest that the Church of Jesus Christ is facing an adaptive moment. In her book *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why*, she notes, "[About] every five hundred years the empowered structures of institutionalized Christianity, whatever they may be at that time, become an intolerable carapace that must be shattered in order that renewal and new growth may occur."[75] Such a time, according to Tickle, is now; change is upon us; the church is emerging into something new. The global pandemic of 2020 only served to accelerate and exacerbate those changes, and the issue is not if we should deal with those changes, but how.

Van Gelder and Zscheile situate their book, *Participating in God's Mission: A Theological Missiology for the Church in America*, around a similar topic. They "argue that American life and American Christianity are experiencing a moment of major transition… Many of the narratives and structures that have framed and organized our lives and the place of the church within that context appear to be coming apart."[76] Describing this period in American ecclesiastical history as the "Great Unraveling," Van

---

[74] Tod Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2015), 42.

[75] Tickle, 16.

[76] Craig Van Gelder and Dwight Zscheile, *Participating in God's Mission: A Theological Missiology for the Church in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 5.

Gelder and Zscheile argue that the church has struggled to adjust to the present age. "From the 9/11 terror attacks, through the Great Recession of 2008-09, and into a decade that is being defined by random acts of terror, resurgent populism, and an ever-increasing technological change, this new century has ushered in a deep sense of insecurity in American life and a new set of challenges for local church ministry."[77] Norms once taken for granted are now viewed firmly under scrutiny; models placing Reformation-born, Euro-tribal Christian faith traditions at the center of Christendom are shifting toward a "vital and dynamic new moment in the world Christian movement, centered in the Global South."[78]

Meaning, churches in the Global North and West (i.e., the American church) can no longer presume that people will show up en masse to an institution once central to cultural life; instead, the church must adapt. It must alter its mindset from being a Body that "does mission" as part of its programming to being an agency that is missionary to its core. Just as God sent Jesus through the incarnation, so the church must send its people to incarnate God's mission within the neighborhood of God. As Van Gelder and Zscheile relate, "The church is a community created by the Spirit, who is intended by God to fully participate in God's mission. It exists, not for itself, but for God and for its neighbors both at home and around the world, pointing toward the horizon of an alternative future of a healed creation."[79]

---

[77] Van Gelder and Zscheile, 14.

[78] Van Gelder and Zscheile, 35

.

[79] Van Gelder and Zscheile, 37.

Bolsinger's work – drawing upon that of Heifetz and Linsky – aligns with Van Gelder and Zscheile. He argues for an apostolic, transformational ecclesiology to meet this pivotal, adaptive moment in the life of the Church.

> [Congregational] leadership in a post-Christendom context is about communal transformation for mission. Christian community is not merely about connection, care and belonging. Spiritual transformation is not just about becoming more like Christ as an end in itself. In a post-Christendom world that has become a mission field right outside the sanctuary door, Christian community is about gathering and forming a people, and spiritual transformation is about both individual and corporate growth, so that they – together – participate in Christ's mission to establish the kingdom of God 'on earth as it is in heaven.'"[80]

In order for this transformation to take place – both within the leader and the congregation – Bolsinger argues compellingly for the need to develop an expanded adaptive, missiological capacity. By sharpening and cultivating skills in adaptation, leaders and congregations can minister more effectively to a world whose needs are changing.

If, then, these guides are correct that this is an adaptive moment for the Body of Christ, and if the response is to sharpen and cultivate skills in adaptation, thereby developing adaptive capacity, how does that manifest at a hyper-local level in a congregation like FPC LaGrange? To Van Gelder and Zscheile's point, how does a church that has been historically reliant upon receiving and attending to those who show up on campus now make the adaptive shift to becoming, fundamentally, a missionary agency sent to join in God's already-existing mission for the world? Amid a changing environment where there are no clear answers, what might it look like for FPC to leave the map behind and venture ahead to uncharted waters? For that matter, is there a template for what adaptive leadership might resemble for the church moving forward?

---

[80] Bolsinger, 39.

It turns out that, biblically speaking, the book of Acts provides exactly such a framework.

*Acts as a Framework for Adaptive Theology and Practice*

While this section will argue that Acts provides a biblical template for adaptive leadership – specifically within the stories of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch and Peter's encounter with Cornelius – it is important to remember that Acts is the second piece to a two-work volume, Luke-Acts. Within the Gospel portion, the author (whose traditional identity as Luke the physician is commonly disputed)[81] establishes themes upon which Acts expands that will be relevant when proposing a theology of adaptive leadership.

Luke opens the Gospel by addressing a "most excellent Theophilus" – an individual who remains something of a mystery. In his commentary on the Gospel, scholar Justo L. González notes, "As to who 'Theophilus' might have been, the truth is that we simply do not know. The title Luke gives him, 'most excellent,' was usually reserved for certain fairly high echelons in Roman society."[82] Whether or not Theophilus was an actual person or something of an encrypted reference to the early Christian congregation – as the name is translated as "God lover" or "beloved of God" – is up for debate. Regardless, says González, the letter has much to offer its audience – be it an individual or a collective. "[The] book is addressed to all of us who, like Theophilus, need to 'know the truth concerning the things about which [we] have been instructed.'"[83]

---

[81] While there is substantive debate surrounding authorship, for the sake of simplicity and clarity the writer will be referred to as Luke for the duration of the paper.

[82] Justo L. González, *Luke: Belief, A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 16.

[83] González, 16.

While the audience is of interest, the subject of greater value for our purposes is that of theme. Fundamentally, Luke-Acts is about movement, both in the figurative and literal sense. González describes this movement in geopolitical terms, noting, "In a world where all power and all important decisions were expected to come from Rome, and within the context of a Judaism centered in Jerusalem, Luke tells a story that begins in Galilee – a marginal land by both Roman and Jewish standards – and then moves on to bring its message and its power first to Jerusalem, and then to Rome itself."[84] In that sense, Luke moves from the outside in – from the fringes of society to the cultural center. Yet, at the same time, Luke works from the inside out – from the Jewish insider to the Gentile outsider, from the center of Jerusalem to the periphery of Samaria and the ends of the earth.

The story begins with the miraculous tale of the priest Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, who was unable to have children. Her barrenness would have rung alarms to the original hearers of the account; memories of Sarai and Hannah may have sprung to mind, giving the Gospel – from its outset – a particularly Jewish character. The miracle's orientation around the sanctuary of the Lord would also have lent itself to appearing as a story specifically tailored for the Jews, as would have the angel's proclamation that Elizabeth and Zechariah's son would never consume wine or strong drink (giving John the Baptist, like the prophet Samuel, nazirite qualities). Even Mary's Magnificat in the latter half of Luke 1 bears a striking resemblance to Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2.

While the beginning of Luke's Gospel would have resonated particularly with the Jewish audience, in Luke 3 there begins a significant turn. The genealogy offers a subtle

---

[84] González, 5.

nuance differentiating itself from Jesus' family tree in Matthew. Whereas Matthew's Gospel opens with a lineage linking Jesus directly to Abraham as a son of David, Luke's Gospel connects Jesus not only to his Abrahamic and Davidic brethren, but all of the way back to the beginning of humanity itself with Adam and, ultimately, to God. As González notes, "[Luke] needs to connect the story of Jesus not just with the history of Israel but with all of human history. Jesus is the culmination of the history of Israel; but he is also the culmination of the history of all humankind. In order to show this, Luke offers a genealogy that does not stop at Abraham, but goes back to the very beginning of creation, Adam."[85]

That theme pervades the rest of the Gospel, beginning with Luke 4, after Jesus is rejected by the people in his hometown – the ultimate insiders – for suggesting that he, like Elijah and Elisha before him, was sent to the Gentiles as well as Jews. From there, Jesus' message – culminating in its ultimate rejection in Jerusalem – has a decidedly outward-looking bent. In Luke 9, for instance, Jesus not only commissions his disciples to cure diseases and bring the good news to the people, but to do so *everywhere*. In Luke 10, Jesus appoints 72 additional followers to go to *every town* and *every place* he intended to go and to eat and drink whatever they would provide. There is a decidedly global thrust to Luke's Gospel, one in which Jesus sends his disciples to join in God's mission – per Luke 4 – of bringing good news to the poor, proclaiming release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, and setting free those who are oppressed. Thus Luke, at its core, is an inclusive, expansive Gospel in which the blind, the crippled, the poor, and the lame are welcome at the great banquet table of God, where filthy prodigals are wrapped in their parent's arms, where a Jewish archenemy "Good

[85] González, 54.

Samaritan" heroically attends to the vulnerable on a roadside, where Zacchaeus the tax collector is a picture of salvation, and where Lazarus the befallen and the bedraggled becomes Lazarus the beautiful and the blessed.

In some ways, Jesus' final words in Luke's concluding chapter sums up the entire Gospel.

> Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you – that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised, so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."[86]

*To all nations, beginning from Jerusalem*. This is the pattern Luke establishes from the very beginning to the end of the Gospel. It follows, then, that just as Luke oriented its Gospel beginning around the Temple and Jerusalem, so, too, would the apostles be commanded to establish their ministry from the inside out, from Jerusalem and all Judea to Samaria and the ends of the earth. This is where Luke's second volume, the book of Acts, picks up. The apostles' call is to build upon Jesus's momentum – halting though it may have seemed with Jesus' apparent death by crucifixion. God's mission through the resurrected and ascended Christ had begun; the work of the disciples was to join in and further inaugurate that ministry.

However, in order to do so, Jesus' people would be forced to adapt. No longer was their Savior with them – not physically, at least – to show them the way. No longer could they lean in on his every word and be at his beck and call. And, as they would discover, no longer was this story only for them and their Jewish brethren; God's Spirit

[86] Luke 24: 44-49

was at work among all people, both Jew and Gentile. To be clear – and this is a key point – this is not to suggest that the faith of the Jews (i.e., Peter) was being replaced or superseded by a superior faith; rather, the apostles' practices were being adapted by the Spirit of Pentecost who was pushing them outward to navigate uncharted waters. No longer would they be bound by temple-centered, ritual-purity manifestations of religion. Instead, the Spirit was beckoning them forth into the world to join in ministering to all people – Jew and Gentile alike. In order for that to take place, the Spirit gave the apostles the adaptive capacity to speak in tongues, to heal beggars at the Beautiful Gate, to preach in ways that convicted and converted, to sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, to experiment with ministries of food distribution, and to join in with God's mission on wilderness roads and within Gentile homes.

Put succinctly, the Acts of the Apostles is a book not only about the growth of the early church, but it is also an accounting of early church leaders exercising adaptive leadership by the power of the Spirit at work within them. Mirroring Bolsinger's framework, before them was a constantly changing environment where there were no clear answers; there was an ongoing transformation on the part of the leaders and the led; and there was the unavoidable reality that the new solution resulted in the loss of what the apostles and their congregations had known giving way to something far more life-altering and life-giving.

This theme of adaptation is amplified in chapter 8, following the stoning of Stephen – as Saul approvingly looked on – with the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. By that point, Philip had been summoned to preach the Word within the city of Samaria. This initiative, due in no small part to Saul's persecution of the church in

Jerusalem, marked a profound adaptation within the mission of the early church. Much in the same way that Jesus' initial rejection at home had spurred his ministry outward, so, too, did Saul's threats result in a significant outward expansion of the Jesus movement. As a function of that move, Philip's ministry had evolved, moving from a service of food distribution in chapter 6 to that of proclamation and conducting signs in chapter 8. So significant was Philip's success that the disciples in Jerusalem saw fit to send Peter and John to Samaria so that these Samaritans "might receive the Holy Spirit." This was no small feat considering the tumultuous history between Jews and Samaritans.

It is then that we read in Acts 8:26, "Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, 'Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.' (This is a wilderness road.)" There, on the wilderness road (which, given Jesus's encounter with the disciples on the *road* to Emmaus in Luke, might create within the reader/hearer an expectation of divine encounter),[87] Philip meets an unnamed eunuch from Ethiopia. Not only would this individual's nationality have marked him as decidedly "other," so would his status as a eunuch. Author Willie James Jennings describes the eunuch thusly:

> His difference is marked by his origin in Ethiopia, the outer limits of the known world, and is even signified by his blackness. His difference is also marked by his sexuality, neither unambiguously male nor female… This Ethiopian eunuch is the outer boundary of the possibility of Jewish existence, and there at that border God will bring that difference near, very near, to hearth of home in the Spirit.[88]

---

[87] Like the mention of the word 'road,' wilderness is not without its own connotations. Jesus' temptations in the wilderness and the people's experience in the wilderness post-exodus, for example, would have rendered the word 'wilderness' laden with meaning for Acts' audience. Wilderness signifies transition; it also symbolizes a place in which an individual or a people are transformed and equipped for what comes next. Viewed together, then, a 'wilderness road' could be interpreted as a liminal space – a transitional space – in which a divine encounter of preparation and equipping would have been anticipated.

[88] Willie James Jennings, *Acts: Belief, A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 83-84.

After catching the chariot, Philip hears the eunuch reading from the prophet Isaiah. Philip asks if the eunuch understands what he is reading, to which he replies, “How can I unless someone guides me?” The Scripture comes from Isaiah’s 53rd chapter, in which an individual is compared to a sheep led to slaughter, a lamb silent before its shearer, humiliated, its life taken away from the earth. Sheepishly (pun intended), the eunuch asks, “About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” Interpreted via the perspective of a eunuch who knew well the humiliation of a sheep being sheared, it is not a stretch to conclude that the eunuch hears his own story within that section of Isaiah. Yet it is not the prophet being referenced here; Philip contends that the allusion is to none other than Jesus. Thus, in that pedagogical moment, Philip links Jesus’ own humiliation with that of the eunuch. It is no wonder, then, that the Ethiopian eunuch would want to be baptized in the name of a Savior with whom he could personally identify and who could personally identify with him.

The story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch is noteworthy for a number of reasons. The encounter not only builds upon adaptive shifts that were already taking place within the early church with its missional move away from Jerusalem to the wilderness road, but it also further demonstrates precisely where those shifts were originating. Or rather, from whom. It is not Philip who sends himself down the wilderness road; it is not Philip who identifies the eunuch’s chariot as that which needed approaching; it is not Philip who ultimately causes his own departure from the eunuch post-baptism. In each case, the initiative is divinely-driven. It is God who sends Philip; it is God who appoints Philip to the chariot; it is God who establishes the wilderness road as the gateway “to the ends of the earth.” Which is not to say that Philip is passive; there

is a response on his part. He discerns which direction to steer the conversation and, in what is perhaps the most salient point for the purposes of this project, he ministers to the eunuch *through a ministry of education, by a pool of water no less*. "Do you understand what you are reading?" asks Philip. "How can I unless someone guides me?" responds the eunuch. However, on and before the wilderness road, it is the Spirit who empowers and equips Philip for ministry. Then and only then does Philip empower and equip the eunuch for a transition to new life – not only for himself, but also for the early church whose influence was now spreading toward the ends of the earth – by educating the Ethiopian about what he was reading. In short, Philip adapts, but he does so at the Spirit's behest.

The subsequent two chapters in Acts follow a similar pattern. In Acts 9, Saul is encountered by Jesus himself – on a road, appropriately enough – where he is immediately educated about the nature of the Christ he is persecuting. The scales of his previous worldview fall from his eyes, and he is equipped with a Christological perspective through which he would henceforth proclaim the Gospel. Here again, the action is instigated – not by a human's own volition, but by that of the divine. It is Jesus who approaches Saul; it is Jesus who begins the conversation. It is not only that Saul's name and life are changed; it is that those changes are established as a result of Jesus' gracious initiative. Saul is not passive, however. He responds; he learns; he joins in the conversation and, thereby, joins in God's mission; he leans into a new reality with no clear answers. In short, in becoming the apostle Paul, Saul adapts, but he does so at Jesus' behest.

Meanwhile, in chapter 10, Peter himself undergoes something of a conversion – and once again, it is God who makes the initial move. However, the story does not begin with Peter's experience; it starts with Cornelius', the Gentile centurion. It is not insignificant that, within this seminal account of the expansion of Christ's church from Jew to Gentile, the story itself commences via the eyes of the Gentile. That is to say, Acts 10 makes it explicitly clear that God was already at work well ahead of Peter and the established church; Peter's role is to join in with that work. In fact, that work quite literally comes to Peter's doorstep. Yes, God approaches Peter and educates him about the trajectory of the church via a vision. No longer would this be a movement limited to the so-called cleanliness of the Jews; rather, the Gospel of Christ is meant to be carried to the ends of the earth, to Jew and Gentile alike. "What God has made clean, you must not call profane," verse 15 tells us. However, verse 17 plainly tells us that Peter was puzzled by the nature of the vision; it is only when the very people to whom he would be sent appear on his doorstep that he begins his evolution in earnest. Peter's education – his adaptation – occurs only because God had already inaugurated that work among the Gentiles. His work, then, is to respond by following Cornelius' men to his house, where Peter's education would be further enriched. As he proclaims in verses 34-35, "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every people anyone who fears him and practices righteousness is acceptable to him." Jennings elaborates on Peter's reformation, saying:

> Peter has been on a journey of listening, and in the intimate space of Cornelius's home that journey continues. Cornelius reveals to Peter the extension of the divine hand reaching out and down into the life of this citizen-soldier. Peter listens and hears the word of God in new and unanticipated places. Before Peter will offer his truth he must listen. This is the key currency of the new order. This is the engine that will operationalize holy joining. Listening for the word of God in

> others who are not imagined with God, not imagined as involved with God, but whom God has sought out and is bringing near to the divine life and to our lives. Peter speaks, and now his earlier conclusion – that he should no longer call anyone unholy or unclean – joins an additional insight: God shows no partiality.[89]

Likewise, Cornelius, the Gentile centurion, listens and learns. Continues Jennings:

> Cornelius and his family and friends are listening. There is great power in the quiet of their listening because they are angled toward the new, ready and poised for it. They already know and sense the divine hand guiding and leading them to this messenger. So Peter preaches. His words summarize the story, but Luke allows his words to do more. Peter now claims even more of the power of the storyteller to re-narrate the world and life itself.[90]

There is thus a mutuality in their education and, consequently, a reformation of their communal life, one in which both Jew and Gentile dismiss old grudges and unite in a work bound together by the Pentecostal power of the Holy Spirit. Peter and Cornelius lean into an uncertain future; they transgress boundaries they had yet to cross; their previous ways of living and being give way to something far more expansive and inclusive than what they had experienced heretofore. In short, Peter and Cornelius adapt, but they do so at God's behest.

Acts thus offers a framework through which we may offer a theology of adaptive leadership. As Bolsinger would say, the church of the biblical world – and that of the present world, for that matter – presents a constantly changing environment in which there are no clear answers. Such changes require fishing uncharted waters, where both leaders and followers are forced to learn; as a corollary, there is also a net loss of old ways giving way to new understandings and practices. While there may be resistance – as there certainly was with Saul and his ilk – these new practices can serve to carry the mission forward well beyond the wilderness road into a bold new future. Of course, there

---

[89] Jennings, 111-112.

[90] Jennings, 112.

will be failures and shortcomings; the process of church growth was not always a straight line for the apostles. There were challenges, imprisonments, even loss of life. Yet, amid a time when previously-held notions of the divine were giving way to new understandings, one constant that remained for the apostles was God – the primary, divine, adaptive agent. God incarnated; God initiated; God innovated. Thus, it is not God's people who provide the nexus point for new ideas; rather, God approaches and the people respond – not passively, but actively at the Spirit's direction. Therefore, God as witnessed by those in Acts is not a passive God; instead, God is one who actively adapts. The leaders of Acts then join in with God's adaptive work, even unto the ends of the earth.

If God is the primary adaptive agent, then what is the role of the church? How are we to engage God's mission? Do we await God's directive by sitting on rooftops or seeking out chariots on wilderness roads? Or is there another way? There is, of course, something to be said for the role of divine intervention in discerning a congregation's adaptive direction. Acts certainly shows its audience that the Spirit can and will show up wherever the Spirit so chooses.

However, Acts – alongside the work of guides like Heifetz, Linsky, Bolsinger, Van Gelder, and Zscheile – does offer much in the way of practical considerations for adaptive leadership. At a very simple level, the church is called to respond. How that response manifests will vary from context to context; that said, the Church of Jesus Christ – like the Savior we follow and the Spirit who works both within and ahead of us – is not called upon to be a passive agency. Rather, when the Spirit moves, we are summoned to move, as well. If or when we sense the Spirit's urging in a particular direction, the church

– like Philip, Paul, Peter, and Cornelius – is called to join in and respond, by adaptive means when necessary.

Of course, that does beg the question: how does the church discern that it is a Spirit-led adaptation – and not an adaptation of human origin? It is a complicated piece, to be sure, with no failsafe answer. However, when looking at Acts and the work of Heifetz, Linsky, Bolsinger, Van Gelder, and Zscheile, certain trendlines do emerge. For one, it is clear that a practice of adaptive leadership must be inherently missional. That is, the work of Jesus and his followers was – and must remain – outward-looking in nature. The God of adaptation forced the early church away from its center in Jerusalem to the boundaries of its existence; it is likely, then, that the present-day church will need to join in God's already-existing work with those living on the margins of our world. Churches, using Bolsinger's parlance, will necessarily be subjects of transformation for God's mission on the wilderness roads of the world.

Furthermore, per Heifetz and Linsky, a practice of ecclesiastical adaptive leadership entails mutuality and corporate ownership of the adaptive process. It is critical that the work of adaptation be a shared – as opposed to an individual – effort. Within that process, there must be education – on the part of both the leader and the led. In fact, education was very much at the core of the process for Philip, the eunuch, Paul, Peter, and Cornelius. The Spirit shed light upon new understandings for these pivotal characters; therefore, it is likely the Spirit is shedding light upon the church in our own adaptive process. Pedagogy – be it on the balcony or the dance floor, the rooftop or the Gentile home – is imperative.

Relatedly, ecclesiastical adaptive leadership means – to borrow Heifetz and Linsky's phrasing – disturbing and disrupting people at a rate they can absorb. It is notable that, in the stories of Philip, the eunuch, Saul/Paul, and Peter and Cornelius, God meets these individuals right where they are. There, God does not shut them down; instead, the Spirit calls upon them to adapt in a way that invites and encourages them forward. This approach expands upon Jesus' incarnational ministry – that God is not distant from us, but rather that God is there in the experience with us. To be a disciple of the One who is the primary adaptive agent is to get off of the balcony and onto the dance floor with the people whom we are leading. In so doing, we join in the Spirit's lead, who pushes us forward without turning us away. We must do the same with our congregations.

Finally, it is very likely that practices of ecclesiastical adaptive leadership will incur resistance and loss. Adaptive leadership in a church is not a means of self-preservation; rather, it is a process grounded in divinely-oriented communication, ideation, innovation, and exaltation as the Church of Jesus Christ seeks to follow the Spirit's lead and join in with the *missio Dei*. Thus, new models and practices – faithful though they may be – may very likely be subject to persecution and sabotage. The defenders of the status quo, threatened by the prospect of loss, may direct their vitriol directly at the leader. Here, it may be helpful not only to remember that we are disciples of a God who adapts, but also of a Christ who intimately knows rejection and loss. By joining in with God's adaptive work, the rejection we may experience does not go beyond the Divine's understanding; in fact, our rejection and God's own are very much aligned. We are not alone.

What, then, does adaptive practice look like for a church in LaGrange, Georgia, where socioeconomic and educational disparities are drawn largely along racial lines? How might the Spirit be guiding FPC away from an early childhood educational model that exacerbates these disparities and toward a more inclusive prototype that closes those existing gaps? Furthermore, how might God be at work adapting an ecosystem polluted by the original sins of White-engineered oppression and social injustice, and in what ways can FPC join in? Perhaps, if pedagogy is so critical to the adaptive process, there is something to be said for pedagogy itself being the means of adaptation. However, like Peter before us, the first step is to acknowledge that the Spirit is already at work among the people to whom we are being sent. Our job is to listen and to learn – from them and from the Spirit – before discerning how best to respond. For that, we turn to the next chapter.

## *Chapter 3 – Reading the River: Conversations on Childcare*

### *The Project – Background*

Anglers call it reading the river. When fishing, every eddy, every cutbank, every slick behind a series of boulders tells a story. To read the river is to understand more fully a place and to notice how the ecosystem manifests. Perhaps most importantly, reading the river educates an angler just how to approach a given location. It informs strategy; it signifies that you have engaged from a place of listening and observing rather than superimposing previously-held notions and principles upon a given spot. Reading the river does not prohibit failure; however, it does present a proper perspective and a fuller appreciation of the conditions before setting about to accomplish the task at hand.

When examining the waters surrounding FPC LaGrange, it is clear there are not nearly enough early childhood education facilities for the local population. To recap, in 2023, the aforementioned Bellwether study noted that Troup County had a maximum licensed capacity of 2,518 children at childcare centers, despite having 4,263 children aged 0-5 years. Within that context sit FPC Childcare and FPC Montessori – both of which are limited spatially, both of which are at maximum capacity. They, like the early childhood education centers around them, rely upon families' full tuition payments to cover the costs of personnel, building maintenance, insurance and liability, food, and other supplies. Out of the 151 children currently attending FPC's onsite schools, 103 of those children are covered by families paying full tuition. The remaining costs are covered by state-supported CAPS funds,[91] discounts, and/or scholarships provided by the

[91] A reminder: as of March 2025, CAPS supplements tuition for 7 families at FPC Childcare.

schools.[92] However, not all people qualify for those funds due to a number of factors, ranging from the number of children being covered (with CAPS, families with multiple children are prioritized) to the amount of income a family receives (e.g., families may be denied CAPS funding because they make too much money in what often are low-paying jobs). For their part, schools may also raise funds via grants, government assistance, or other fundraising initiatives to cover the costs of student scholarships or overhead. However, to do so requires a school staff with ample time and energy to research, to prepare, and to submit grant requests or to organize fundraisers with consistency, which may not be feasible when early childhood education directors and staff members are overtaxed as it is.[93]

Resultantly, communities like Troup County and LaGrange are left with an adaptive challenge: not enough spots in local centers for the local population, schools requiring a vast majority of families to pay full tuition in order to survive, few centers that can afford much – if anything – in the way of discounts, and costs that are prohibitive for families. Compounding that challenge is a pronounced racial socioeconomic and

[92] FPC Childcare provides a 5% discount for 30 families who are either church members, church staff, or Childcare staff. Montessori, meanwhile, provides a 50% employee discount for 6 families, a 10% sibling discount for 9 families, and a 30% financial aid scholarship for 3 families.

[93] As an example, both the FPC Childcare and Montessori Directors are currently charged with supporting their staff, coordinating with their respective volunteer boards, ensuring the proper accreditation requirements are met, substitute teaching when necessary, liaising with parents and families, and conducting searches for a workforce that turns over frequently – amid other more menial duties as they arise. Put bluntly, to add grant research or fundraising to what is already an extraordinarily heavy workload for these employees constitutes an unrealistic expectation. It may be possible for schools to contract grant writers to do the work on their behalf; however, grant writers may also require financial investment from the centers they serve. Boards can be supportive in raising funds (e.g., establishing Parent Teacher Organizations); yet, in the case of Childcare and Montessori, the reality is these volunteer-driven boards lean heavily on the initiative of their staff directors.

educational gap within which White families are statistically more affluent than their Black counterparts and more successful at an early age in the classroom. This suggests a need for earlier interventions for Black children, yet the statistics indicate that many Black families will not be able to afford the early childhood schools. A technical solution could be to build more centers or to expand currently existing enrollments, thus creating more spots for all children; yet the reality is that initiatives like those require capital that can be difficult to attain. Furthermore, even if a school was built or a center was expanded, who is to say families could afford to attend them? Another technical solution could be for centers to apply for grants in order to subsidize costs for impoverished families, yet it has already been mentioned that such efforts require both time and energy on the schools' part. It is also no guarantee that grants or government assistance will be approved. The unfortunate net result is that many children – especially children of color – will not attend, which affects both a child's readiness for elementary school and a family's ability to maintain a job (as family members must often stay home to care for their children).

The central question of this work is to consider just how God might be calling FPC of LaGrange, Georgia to meet this adaptive challenge with a new educational mission wholly accessible to all families within our community. Drawing upon the project's central metaphor, how can we join God in equipping and empowering our children and families to fish by expanding both the capacity and accessibility of FPC's early childhood education centers? In addition, how might a theology and practice of adaptive leadership inform the congregation's approach?

While the first two chapters have established context and considered adaptive theology and practices necessary for ministry, the third chapter will chronicle the project itself, including its overview, implementation, and results. Yet this chapter will also underscore a crucial element: the importance of hearing directly from those to and with whom the church is looking to minister. Using Heifetz and Linsky's example, to avoid that step would be to ignore the dance floor and pretend as if all knowledge and strategy can be gleaned from the balcony alone. Or, put another way, it would be as if Peter failed to listen to God, to Cornelius, and to Cornelius' community, and instead based his ministry to the Gentiles upon his own notions of right and wrong. Rather than acknowledging the already-existing *missio Dei*, to ignore the voices of our potential partners in ministry would completely deny the Spirit's work ahead of the congregation. Not only that, for FPC to avoid listening to and learning from our neighbors could serve only to exacerbate the community's original sins of White-initiated oppression and injustice under the false pretense that a predominantly White institution knows what is best for all people.

Therefore, it is a foundational belief of this project (and its writer) that the voices of those from the community at large be heard – to learn from their hopes, their dreams, their longings, fears, and frustrations. To do so will help us to understand the architecture of this place more fully; to receive further insight on just how the ecosystem functions; and to be presented with a proper perspective of the conditions before setting about to join the Spirit in the mission at hand.

In other words, to move ahead, we need to read the river.

*The Project – Implementation and Results*

The project centered around a series of qualitative interviews with people in the community for whom childcare has proven to be either financially burdensome or untenable. The point of the interviews was to measure the interest in and feasibility of a fully accessible, downtown-church-based model and to explore what that model might look like. Additionally, the interviews sought to understand the hopes, dreams, frustrations, and obstacles these families are navigating.

In order to secure potential interviewees, I contacted a number of people in the community who work closely with individuals and families living in poverty. These are people who currently serve the FPC Childcare and Montessori, the Troup County School System (specifically school counselors and central officer workers), and local nonprofit Circles of Troup County. After informing them about the nature of the project and the interviews, they sent me the names and contact information of 19 individuals they themselves had confirmed would be interested in the research I was conducting.

Upon receiving their names, I reached out via phone call and text message to the individuals to introduce myself and thank them for their willingness to participate. I also informed them about the nature of the project, the kind of questions to which they would be responding, and the length of time the interview would take (approximately one hour, out of respect to their time). Afterward, we discussed times that would work best for them to meet. The in-person piece was important as I not only wanted to hear what they had to say, but I also wanted to note any shifts or expressions of body language. After contacting each of the individuals, I organized them into groups (according to the times they could meet) and confirmed the appointment with them.

The original plan was to convene four or five interview groups, with each gathering consisting of four to six people plus myself. The interviews were to take place in a public, neutral setting. However, the interviewees' schedules – and Mother Nature, for that matter – forced us to change course. Unfortunately, the interviews were scheduled during the height of flu season in Georgia, meaning a number of people had to cancel due to illness. There were also significant winter weather events in Georgia that forced us to reschedule. Some individuals, in spite of initial interest, could not make an interview due to hectic work and family schedules. Others simply fell out of touch. Ultimately, out of the original 19 individuals who were contacted, 7 people – all of them women – made the interviews. We also had to adjust our meeting venue, as we discovered, due to FPC's central location, that the church proved to be the best place for us to gather. There, we met in a room down the hall from the main office, where participants could enter and exit easily, quickly, and anonymously. In spite of the changes, the time spent with these individuals did prove incredibly valuable and informative.

Ahead of our time together, I sent each group a document outlining the hour. Included within that document were the reasons for the project (i.e., to study how FPC might adapt its educational mission so that, per its vision, "all may know God's love"), the time required for the interview, and the list of questions I would be asking. I wanted to offer these questions ahead of time so the interviewees could be prepared coming in and offer well-thought-out responses.

- What hopes and dreams do you have for the children in your community?
- To this point, what has early childhood education looked like for your family?

- What does an ideal early childhood education look like for your family (e.g. location, hours, other)?
- What challenges or barriers have you encountered to accessing ideal quality childcare education for your family?
- What – if anything – could a church like FPC do to help your family reach your hopes and dreams for your children?
- Given that we are here to talk about childcare, is there anything else I should know or another question I should have asked?

In addition, the document clearly stated that the interviews would be recorded (which was done via iPhone Voice Memo) and transcribed (which I ultimately contracted out to an online third party organization called GoTranscript, which ensured anonymity), that their identity would be protected via the usage of pseudonyms, and that the results of the project could be shared with a number of people, including the project readers, the Childcare Board, the Montessori Board, and the FPC Session. The interviewees were also apprised that, should any allegations or evidence of abuse or neglect arise during the course of the interviews, I would adhere to FPC policies stating that I am mandated to report any potential abuse or criminal activity to the proper authorities. I also informed the group members of potential benefits from participating in the interviews, including:

- determining whether or not there is a need for a new or expanded, fully accessible, downtown-church-based childcare facility;
- painting a picture of what that facility might look like and how it could best address their hopes, dreams, and needs as a parent or guardian.

At the conclusion, participants were asked to sign their names and to note a listing of family support agencies at the bottom of the document. After signing, the interviewees kept one copy for themselves while giving the other copy to me.

As expected, there was a mixture of emotions from the participants upon arrival. Some showed up apprehensive, if not a bit nervous. Others were enthusiastic and ready to engage. Most – if not all – of the interviewees had read the questions and came prepared with responses; one even arrived with a notebook full of thoughts she wanted to convey. While a few of the participants knew one another, a number of them arrived as strangers. To a person, they all were pleased and eager to help in any way they could.

The first question regarding their hopes and dreams for childcare in the community proved, for some, an emotional one. During the first group, a 30-year-old White woman and mother of one toddler, Pamela,[94] teared up before responding.

> For our friends who are saying, "Well, I'm not going to go back to work because I've paid the same salary in daycare," I dream for our community where families don't have to make that choice. Where if parents want to work, they can. They don't feel pressure that they either have to be a mom or an employee. They can be both and that can be their choice. Does that make sense?[95]

In a response no less emotional, a 28-year-old White woman named Cynthia – the one bearing the aforementioned notebook – made a passionate plea for childcare centers to be a place where all children are welcome, “no matter their abilities or disabilities, their background or behaviors.” For her, “Childcare facilities, the quality, faith-based aspect, et cetera, [should] not depend on the expense. Meaning parents [should not] have to base

---

[94] For purposes of anonymity, all names referenced within the interviews are pseudonyms.

[95] It should be noted that, where appropriate, comments have been edited for purposes of clarity.

their children's care on what they can afford versus what the child deserves or where they would thrive." Tonya, a 28-year-old White, single mother, requested more support as a parent. "I think that outside of the children aspect of it, if we had more resources for either low-income families or for single parents, that would help give our children access to grow and thrive into who they need to become, whether it be in elementary school, daycare age and thus forth." Meanwhile, Lila, a 44-year-old Black woman and mother of two, called for equity among the schools. "For them to all have a standard level of education, and by that I mean access to the same type and level of curriculum. I feel like it varies depending on where you go."

While the opening question centered around hopes and dreams, the women in each group spent very little time there. Instead, they quickly pivoted to their challenging experiences with early childhood education centers. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there were numerous pitfalls, chief among them being the price. As Pamela noted:

> A lot of the times when you hear families say, "Well, we both work," the assumption is they can afford daycare. In full transparency, our daycare is over 75% of our mortgage payment. I'll say it one more time; that our daycare cost per month is 75% of our mortgage. We don't live in a lavish home but we can stay in this home. We're fine. We live pretty moderately. We're pretty frugal, but, man, what if we want to have more children? We're not talking about that right now because… we can't be paying two daycares. I feel like that's in the Lord's hands. That's not necessarily my decision, but again, I don't think people should have to – oh, sorry [getting emotional]. I really don't love that people have to have those conversations, what they're thinking about.

Tracy, a 43-year-old Black woman who works a round-the-clock job with her husband, agrees. "[It's] so expensive. Luckily, I make enough but it's still expensive, especially with everything going up. I got a discount, but that doesn't last." One of the mothers confessed she was behind on childcare payments, largely because she was no longer eligible for CAPS. She had changed jobs, and the accompanying raise meant she

exceeded qualifying income limits by $400. Another mother stated she could only make childcare work because she currently receives CAPS funding from the state; if that were to go away, she did not know what she would do. One mother noted that recent changes in CAPS – which allowed her family to afford childcare – meant you only qualify in "extreme circumstances." Janet, a 28-year-old Black woman and mother of four children who attended her interview with a toddler in tow, remarked on the "insane pricing" for childcare.

While prohibitive pricing regularly came up in our conversations, so did the issue of consistency of care. While Lila largely complimented her children's school,[96] many of the other mothers had experienced challenging circumstances. A number of them described the care their children had received as being unloving or non-Christian or under-resourced. Sharon, a 28-year-old White single mother of two children, described a particularly troubling situation when she picked up her child from daycare with frostbite on her hands. The interviewees regularly commented on a lack of training for staff, high turnover of employees at local facilities, and a need for improved communication between centers and families. The second group, in particular, identified struggles with entrusting their children to centers based on previous experiences. In fact, trust – or lack thereof – was an issue that regularly surfaced in our conversations. Janet summed up the sentiment, saying:

> Like I said, I don't trust [anybody] with my kids because you never know. I was skeptical about her going to daycare simply because of everything that's going on now, what you see on the news about the kids being abused or getting bruises on them, stuff like that. Things like that, I have lots of fear about my kids.

[96] It should be noted that, out of all of the interviews, Lila's was something of an outlier. She indicated a comfort level with paying full tuition that far surpassed her peers. She also alluded to both her and her husband's jobs that, seemingly, afford their family a well-paid standard of living.

The issue of inaccessibility was also described as being troublesome for these families. As Pamela stated, “I would just say the supply [is an obstacle]. When [another local church] closed their childcare… during the middle of the year, we would have friends that are like family and they're like, ‘Can you please get us into First Presbyterian?’... There were multiple days where I would drop my son off and pick my son up, and people would just be standing at the door.” The women described wait lists lasting for months and criticized local employers who failed to provide childcare stipends or onsite childcare options. In a community featuring the presence of multiple Fortune 500 companies, they wondered why there appears to be such little support for family care. They also noted a dearth of 24-hour-care facilities in a city where many people have to work multiple shifts.

After leveling those critiques, the interviewees ultimately declared that the most important thing was to have high-quality facilities where they could entrust their children’s care to a well-trained faculty. Cynthia described her ideal learning environment, saying:

> Just quality caregivers and teachers and the environment, and material [about] just taking care of the environment. And making sure that teachers are, like I said earlier, not just good interviewers, but [good] character, how they are with children.

Janet expanded upon issues of trust and the need for equipping teachers in her comments on the ideal situation for her children.

> I think just continuing education, like I said just as far as who is providing that care, I feel is important. Because though the pay may play a huge factor, if you see and you know that people are truly pouring into your child and they are truly giving them the best quality care, and these people are just not perfect, no one's perfect of course, but just they are really passionate about it and they take your

> child in as if it was their own, I feel like it wouldn't be as difficult to have to pay that expense because you know that they're being loved while you're not there.

Tracy noted the importance of child/parent/teacher interaction in her ideal environment. "I definitely like to get feedback on what my child is learning. Homework, so to speak. What they're working on at daycare so I can work on it at home. Actually, be able to see the progress. That's one of the main things for me. Other than my child feeling safe and loved, and that people know who I am and who they are." Lila agreed with Tracy's point, emphasizing the importance of high-quality care and a healthy parent-teacher relationship. As she said, "I trust our [childcare center] owner to make sure that they have been cared for, are being cared for, and are being taught. Because there's that trust, but there's also experience for having that trust, obviously."

In addition to providing high-quality care under a well-trained faculty, Tonya commented on the need for childcare facilities to better support and resource families. "I think that as a community," she noted, "it would be important for us to form support groups for parents, where we can not only get to know each other and grow together, but where we can call on one another…"

The mothers also identified a critical faith component to their children's education – not only for the purposes of faith development, but also for socialization. Tonya described her experience.

> Personally, I grew up in church, and so it's very important that my daughter does the same thing and she has that foundation at a very early age of learning about Jesus and learning the Bible stories and verses, and that she socializes with other kids her age.

Cynthia agreed. "As far as a faith-based Christian aspect, I feel like it's very important for the teachers that are teaching at the Christian facility to also live that Christian lifestyle."

Regarding FPC's role as a supporting agent for families and children, the mothers indicated an interest in an expanded, fully accessible childcare center downtown. While some said the commute for those on the outskirts might prove problematic, others said the central location could be helpful. As for tuition, Janet noted a need for a sliding scale approach.

> Just factoring in people's financial situation and it not being like a set price for everyone, but looking into how many incomes they get in that household, how many children they have, if they have disabilities that cause them to have to work part-time versus full-time. Just things like that.

Tonya continued to advocate for a community center model where parents receive support via groups, resources, and Bible studies. As she said, "For our kids to be in a safe mental space, the parents have to be in that same mental safe space as well." Themes connected to continuing education and teacher support arose, as well as the need to be open longer hours for those who work full days. The presence of a meal program for children was also mentioned.

Upon the conclusion of our time together, the women were grateful for the opportunity to offer input. They also indicated a curiosity about other groups and the feedback I had received. For them, there was an air of hopefulness: that someone recognized a significant problem in their lives and was seeking a way to address it. They felt seen, heard, and valued. They were also anxious to see what would come next, which conferred upon me not only a level of satisfaction, but also of stewardship and responsibility.

*The Project – Reading the River*

When proposing the project, I offered four sensitizing concepts that would provide a lens through which I would interpret the results. Those were the following.

- *Power* – First Presbyterian Church is a White, affluent, downtown congregation. Yet what we are looking at establishing is a fully accessible childcare for all people. What role would historic power dynamics between White, wealthy congregants and impoverished neighbors of color play in a small-town, southern community?
- *Whiteness* – This is not solely a move centered around a powerful White church engaging in mission to/alongside predominantly poor communities of color; it is also a move that would de-center the status quo of White, middle- to upper-class persons having primary access to quality childcare. What role would de-centering this White-privileged experience play in a community whose original sins are rooted in White power?
- *Impartiality* – As Peter notes in Acts 10, "Truly God shows no partiality." If this is the case, what does mission – and in this case a missional childcare – look like that is truly impartial? How might the mission of the church interface with a system that all too often exhibits partiality to those who can afford exorbitant costs for quality early childhood education?
- *Unity* – By the power and initiative of the Spirit, in Acts 8 and 10, people of different backgrounds, different races, and even different theologies carve a new path forward for the Body of Christ together. How does that togetherness and unity translate to the present day? How might the congregation join the Spirit in the adaptive work of unity?

With the interviews now behind me, it is interesting to note how these dynamics were in play. While I was (and still am) concerned that FPC as a seat of symbolic power –

situated downtown with a predominantly middle- to upper-class White congregation – would deter interest from marginalized populations in a fully accessible childcare at the church, that worry was not expressed by the women. Instead, the issue of power was nuanced differently. From the interviewees' perspective, there was an implication that FPC as a seat of power has a responsibility to make a difference simply because it can. Although it went unspoken, there was something of a silent plea for help amid extreme concern for the future. Relatedly, Whiteness itself was not explicitly broached during the interviews. There was, however, a clarion call to disrupt the status quo – especially for those who cannot afford high-quality childcare – among both White and Black interviewees. Although they did not necessarily couch it in these terms, what these ultimately women long for is a system that is both fully accessible and impartial, especially through more practical means like sliding scale tuition, longer hours, and additional spots. On these issues, each of the women demonstrated a remarkable unity – both for the sake of their families and children, and also for that of the community.

That being said, there was one other unexpected sensitizing concept that consistently arose during the course of the interviews: the issue of trust. Clearly a part of the ecosystem – of the river's architecture, as it were – is a lack of trust on a number of levels:

- a lack of trust in a system that renders affordable childcare a difficult – if not impossible – proposition, especially as state-supported funds grow increasingly challenging to attain;

- a lack of trust in local centers where the level of care is inconsistent, where staff turnover is high, and where childcare teachers do not receive enough in the way of continuing education;
- and a lack of trust that the problem will ever truly get fixed, as local Fortune 500 companies with ample resources sit on their hands, wait lists pile up, and tuition rates skyrocket as a result of inflation.

Thus, the question is not only how FPC might join God in meeting the adaptive challenge at hand; it is also one of trust. How can FPC earn the trust of these families who have continuously been burned and left in the lurch? What practical steps can we take? That is the subject of the fourth and final chapter.

***Chapter 4 – Filling Our Reservoirs***

In 2024, the Georgia State Senate – recognizing the challenges to childcare providers and families – commissioned a bipartisan committee to examine access to affordable childcare. The study's background paints a grim picture:

> Many Georgians struggle to find affordable child care [sic] options, both for preschool and school-aged children. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this problem, forcing many child care centers in this state to close, leaving many child care workers to seek alternative employment.
>
> Despite the availability of various forms of state and federal assistance, many child care centers have either failed to reopen or have opened with limited staff. The recent expiration of allocated funds from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 puts additional child care centers, children, parents, and caregivers at risk, with at least one report suggesting that Georgia may lose 10,575 child care jobs and experience 944 child care program closures, resulting in the loss of care for more than 80,000 children in this state.
>
> In addition to the effects of inflation on the broader economy, the rising cost of child care as a large share of family income makes it a supportive service that is largely unattainable for many Georgians, and estimates suggest that parents without affordable child care options could annually face $218 million in lost wages due to drastically cut work hours or being forced to leave the workforce entirely. In particular, limited access to affordable child care serves as a significant barrier for mothers of young children to enter and remain in the workforce full-time.[97]

Upon concluding their analysis, the committee proposed three recommendations, including:

- improving workforce recruitment, development, and retention through additional options for compensation and tax credit support;[98]

---

[97] Georgia State Senate, *Final Report of the Senate Study Committee on Access to Affordable Child Care (SR 471)*, Senate Office of Policy and Legislative Analysis (December 2024), 4.

[98] For example, in April 2025 the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) announced a new initiative in which teachers and staff at quality-rated childcare centers would receive a $500 bonus as reward for their hard work and commitment. As mentioned earlier, the majority of Troup County early learning centers –

- expanding access to families via additional tax credits for child and dependent care expenses and increasing state funding for CAPS;
- increasing funding opportunities for childcare providers by expanding eligibility for Georgia's tax credit for employer sponsored childcare and by creating new funding sources for programs with proven success.[99]

While there is optimism that the recommendations will be enacted into legislation, the committee's findings will also require open debate on the Georgia Senate floor. Questions will be raised about how much the state should fund these initiatives and if there are other means through which families and centers may be supported.[100] Inevitably, the process to support childcare centers – both at the state and federal levels – will take time (if it ever comes to fruition). Meanwhile, if nothing happens soon, early childhood education centers will close due to an inability to make ends meet, and families will be left scrambling to find a place they can send their child – if they can afford it.

The reservoirs will dry up; fishing spots where our children and families can learn will become fewer and farther between.

---

23 out of 39 – are not quality rated, meaning they will not qualify for this benefit.

[99] Georgia State Senate, 15.

[100] Ross Williams, "Proposals to rein in child care costs in Georgia gain early support from Senate leaders," *Georgia Recorder*, December 13, 2024, https://georgiarecorder.com/briefs/proposals-to-rein-in-child-care-costs-in-georgia-gain-early-support-from-senate-leaders/. As an example of what the Senate has ahead, the Childcare Committee chairman Brian Strickland – a Republican – noted "lawmakers will be cautious about funding and may prefer to focus on expanding existing programs like CAPS rather than creating new programs that could call for high initial investments, such as a proposed early child care trust fund that could cost billions up front but yield more in returns over years and decades." On the other hand, Atlanta Democratic Senator Elena Parent states, "I think that there's no doubt that in order to try to make child care more affordable for families, it will take some state investment, and so then the question is how much are the Republican leaders willing to make a meaningful investment in these critical needs that Georgia parents have?"

While the task ahead for FPC is not to cure the childcare crisis, we are nevertheless summoned to the wilderness road to partner in the Spirit's work – teaching and equipping our neighbors by pools of water. We cannot wait for that work to be accomplished by the powers that be at a governmental level; we cannot stand by while children and families desperately hope for a solution. To remain idle would do nothing in the way of addressing this community's original sins; it would only exacerbate socioeconomic and educational gaps between the White and Black populations that have existed since LaGrange and Troup County were formally incorporated in the 1820's.

Instead, FPC has a responsibility to join in with the Spirit's work of dismantling power inequity, de-centering White privilege rooted in oppression, advocating for a system that is impartial, and cultivating a culture of unity and trust within our context. That is the true nature of the adaptive challenge confronting us; creating a fully accessible childcare center is one means by which we can join God in accomplishing that. The challenge in the wake of this project is for FPC to discern precisely what that looks like.

Of course, the response – like the problem itself – is complicated.

*Project Evaluation, Next Steps, and Conclusion*

While the primary research question of the project was, "How might First Presbyterian Church adapt its educational mission so that, per its vision, 'all may know God's love'?" I would suggest that question was fundamentally flawed. Rather, the question should have been, "How might God be calling First Presbyterian Church to join in the Spirit's adaptive work via a reconfigured educational mission so that, per the congregation's vision, all may know God's love?" God, not FPC, is the primary adaptive agent here; the congregation is called to join in that work. Thus, bearing that in mind, the

impetus of the project really has been to consider how God's adaptive mission might be supported by FPC's educational ministries.

The project's working hypothesis was that Heifetz and Linsky's scholarship – alongside missiological input from Van Gelder, Zscheile, and Bolsinger, and Scriptural guidance from the book of Acts – would produce a way forward yielding new insights and bold practices for FPC's educational ministries. In part, that hypothesis turned out to be true; those sources certainly provided substantive theological and biblical reasons for concluding that the Triune God is an adaptive God paving the way for new ways of living and being. If nothing else, then, the literature – both academic and biblical – validates FPC's suspicion that new practices need to be investigated. However, while the hope was that this project might reveal what those practices might look like, that proved to be overly ambitious.

While the project may not have unveiled what those practices will entail specifically, it did accomplish a couple of important objectives. For one, it affirmed the existence of demand amid an all-too-limited supply – even if, admittedly, the interview pool was not as robust as I had initially hoped. The women not only expressed interest in expanded options for their children; they yearned for it. For them, the existing models were something of a mixed bag, with high rates, inconsistent care, spotty communication, and a middling standard of teaching. There were some places where they had witnessed success, but those proved to be the exception in their experience. Furthermore, there was a collective anxiety among the women interviewed about affordability and accessibility – an anxiety, it should be noted, that often resulted in tears during the course of the project.

Put succinctly, if FPC was to pursue an alternative form of childcare, they would be in full support if that model proves obtainable to them on all levels (e.g., tuition and hours).

Yet what this project and the research behind it have also inculcated is a spirit of innovation – within the ETF and CTF, the Childcare and Montessori Boards, and the schools' directors. There is recognition that the status quo will continue to serve the best interests of a certain segment of the local population while those struggling will only continue to fall further behind. While in generations prior both the Childcare and Montessori have been content to settle in where they are, now there is a sense of urgency to meet a very real missional need.

On one level, that need is being addressed by technical strategies. For instance, both Childcare and Montessori are seeking ways to secure more space in the building so they can expand their numbers. Additionally, both Childcare and Montessori are also looking into scholarships for families who struggle to pay tuition (with Montessori currently providing three; Childcare's families in need are currently only supported by CAPS). While the Montessori currently has a Parent Teacher Organization that buttresses the school financially, the Childcare Board is looking into creating a similar entity within its structure. The Montessori Director has also managed to apply for and receive grant funds, particularly from the Callaway Foundation. These strategies are not bad in and of themselves; in fact, it is true that Childcare and Montessori are doing vital, wonderful work with the children and families they serve via these strategies.

Here, it is important to note something that has not yet been addressed in this paper: that while this work has centered around the need for adaptive leadership, technical solutions do not signify a lack of success or a dearth of faith. In fact, technical

solutions may constitute appropriate, responsible stewardship and an excellent course of action. Best practices are exactly that: *best practices*. They are well-established solutions for a reason; they have netted good results.

Indeed, it is not lost on me that much of what has been suggested as a potential response to the childcare crisis – grants, fundraising, increased salaries – falls within the realm of the technical. This demonstrates the crux of the problem; when facing a quandary as complicated as the issue of childcare, the tendency is to lean upon what we already know. In reality, an adaptive challenge is aptly named; it *is* a challenge, a predicament, a puzzle whose solution proves incredibly elusive. There is reason why legislators debate the best courses of action, why childcare centers struggle to innovate when they are trying to keep afloat, why a gap exists between the number of spots available and the number of children who need a place to go. This work is not easy.

This leads to one of the primary frustrations I experienced over the course of this project – that, after all of the research, the interviews, the reading, and the writing, the reality is I feel no closer to discerning a way forward than I did at the outset. I remain haunted by the voices of the women I interviewed who pleaded for help. I grieve as I walk down the hallways of our schools and look into the eyes of our workers who struggle to make ends meet. I second-guess whether or not I or the church are worthy of the trust of those longing for a place for their children to learn and grow. As a White, well-educated, middle-/upper-class male, I consider my own privilege and the socioeconomic and racial implications of this work. I question if it is truly possible to turn the tide of 200-plus years of oppression, and I wonder if the relatively small – and predominantly White – sample size of interviewees (bringing to mind those who backed

away for no stated reason) is a function of a multigenerational racial distrust. Indeed, it is difficult – to say the least – to overturn White privilege when voices of color are understandably hesitant to come to the table.

The fact is that these are deeply ingrained, deeply entrenched, and deeply complicated dynamics that will be stubborn and resistant to change. Which is precisely why Heifetz and Linsky's work is so important. What is at stake is not whether technical solutions are bad or adaptive leadership is good; rather, the issue is discerning which approach will yield the best outcomes for all of God's beloved children. It is not necessarily a question of either/or, technical or adaptive; it can be both/and.

That being said, there may come a point – when the status quo no longer creates a tenable future, when previous ways of doing or being do not confront the challenges at hand – that different perspectives and approaches are necessary. What this project has revealed, therefore, is a need to shift our thinking, to draw upon best practices while experimenting with new ones, to broaden our sample sizes by continuing to heed the voices of different races and classes, and to be open to the adaptations God is initiating, whatever forms those may take.

To that end, there has been an acknowledgment – both tacit and explicit – among FPC's task forces, school boards, and school directors that previously-used strategies will only carry the schools so far. Space is restricted at the church for expansion, meaning enrollment for the two schools is facing a hard cap of 150 students. There is also limited financial margin from which Childcare and Montessori can operate for student and family support; indeed, the current business models rely upon full tuition payments from the vast majority of families. Under those conditions, Childcare and Montessori will continue to

serve primarily those in the community who can afford to pay their rates. This, from the standpoint of FPC's educational leadership, is not an acceptable course of action. There has to be adaptation.

Of course, the question remains: what form might the adaptation take? One source of inspiration has been the Friends Center for Children (Friends) in New Haven, Connecticut. A school with Quaker roots, Friends began in the early 2000's with an eye toward establishing a setting "with a multi-cultural, multi-racial, socio-economic mix of participants."[101] From there, Friends has grown to a multi-site organization that "strives to maintain best practices in early childhood education by nurturing the whole child and bringing together curriculum, teachers, parents and the larger community within a supportive, inspirational environment."[102] Not only has Friends adopted a sliding-scale tuition model within which one-third of families pay full price, one-third pay partial price, and one-third pay no price, they also are the first childcare center of any kind to offer its employees a housing benefit. Per their website:

> Friends Center for Children's rent free Teacher Housing Initiative offers an innovative solution to increase teacher compensation without burdening our students' families with elevated tuition fees. By providing free housing as a salaried benefit, our Teacher Housing Initiative supports educators by removing their largest monthly expense and helping them reach their financial goals. The Initiative also reduces Friends Center's overall operating costs, enabling us to raise the salaries of ALL our teachers well above Connecticut's average pay for early educators.[103]

---

[101] Friends Center for Children, "Our Story," https://friendscenterforchildren.org/about/our-story/

[102] Friends Center for Children, "Our Values," https://friendscenterforchildren.org/program/our-values/

[103] Friends Center for Children, "Teacher Housing Initiative," https://friendscenterforchildren.org/teacher-housing-initiative/

Thus, instead of raising teacher salaries by increasing student tuition – a technical solution – Friends forged a different path; they adapted. As a result of a focused campaign, Friends purchased a home, which they then contracted out to one of their workers for free.[104] That worker no longer has to worry about their greatest monthly expense – rent – which allows them to build equity and wealth that would have otherwise been devoted to house payments. Not only has the Initiative expanded to numerous homes, it has also fostered a culture of pride and loyalty within Friends. Staff morale has flourished; worker retention has improved; headlines have garnered local and national attention; Friends is thriving.[105]

Resultantly, in recent months, FPC's educational leadership has partnered with Friends to become the second early childhood education center in the country to provide a housing benefit. Rolling out in the spring of 2025, the initiative – known as Groundspring – is a result of FPC's communication with staff members from Friends, Childcare, and Montessori. Two individuals working in the Childcare will benefit, with the newly constructed, two-story duplex being provided by local nonprofit Dependable Affordable Sustainable Housing (or DASH) at a fee to be covered by FPC.[106]

The hope is not only that Groundspring will pave the way for expanded teacher housing, but also that it will further spark a culture of innovation within FPC's onsite schools. The intent is not to stop with this benefit. Soon, the ETF – in partnership with

---

[104] Per the contract, as long as the worker stays with Friends, they can live in the home.

[105] For more information on the Initiative, see Amelia Nierenbert, "One Way to Help Teacher Salaries Go Further: Free Housing," *The New York Times*, September 29, 2023. https://friendscenterforchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/2023_09_29_NYTimes_One_Way_to_Help_Teacher_Salaries_Go_Further_Free_Housing.pdf

[106] Unsurprisingly, FPC will be able to pay this monthly fee thanks to grant monies received from the Callaway Foundation.

the CTF, the Childcare and Montessori Directors, and their respective boards – will initiate conversations on potential business, curriculum, and staffing models for a fully accessible, sliding scale tuition, early childhood education program at the church. This will necessitate adaptation on the part of the church, the Childcare, and the Montessori; to be clear, we do not yet know what form this adaptation will take. However, there is a sense within the ETF that this is the work God is calling us to join. Certainly, the results of this project and its research suggest the need is there.

All of which brings me to the conclusion of this project. Here, I remember the woman – a young, Black mother – who texted me that blustery January day, when weather reports were calling for a chance of snow and ice. There she was, sitting in her car in tears amid her crisis, unable to figure out just how she was going to find care for her daughter. I remember not only her, but also the six other women – White and Black – who described so vividly their struggles navigating the childcare system. I remember not only them, but also Mayor Edmondson, the first Black mayor in LaGrange, recalling his experiences growing up as the segregated 'other' in this city. I remember not only him, but also the countless 'others' unjustly indicted by a system and history rooted in White oppression and subjugation. I remember not only them, but also Gentiles and eunuchs who were 'othered' by the world around them. As I remember them, I also remember Philip, Peter, and Cornelius' calling to engage the other. I remember the Spirit moving ahead of and beyond them; I remember that very same Spirit working within them to build bridges and connection with one another. And I remember that our call as the Church of Jesus Christ is to participate with the Spirit in that very work: with eunuchs on wilderness roads, with Jews and Gentiles on rooftops and within homes, with women

crying out for a place to send their children, and with a mother in tears searching for a school for her baby.

To Bolsinger's point, these are uncharted waters with no clear answer in sight. Nevertheless, they are still waters we are summoned to chart. Pools of water by which all of God's children are bid to listen and to learn from one another. Reservoirs of living water in which our own children are taught to fish.

# Works Cited

Bellwether Education Partners. *Callaway Foundation Education Grantmaking Strategy*. Boston: Bellwether, 2023.

Bellwether Education Partners. *Callaway Foundation Education Grantmaking Strategy Executive Summary*. Boston: Bellwether, 2023.

Binder, Michael, Tessa Pinkstaff, and Dwight Zscheile. *Leading Faithful Innovation: Following God into a Hopeful Future*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2023.

Bolsinger, Tod. *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory*. Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2015.

Callaway Foundation Inc. "Early Beginnings of the Foundation." https://www.callawayfoundation.org/early_beginnings.php.

Dyar, Julia Traylor. *Remembering LaGrange: Musings from America's Greatest Little City*. Charleston: The History Press, 2011.

Edmondson, Dr. Willie. Produced by Leighton Parker. *Lewis and Broad Media*, November 3, 2023. https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/s6-e4-dr-willie-edmondson-mayor-of-lagrange/id1538796578?i=1000633627640.

Equal Justice Initiative. "Lynching in America." https://lynchinginamerica.eji.org/explore.

First Presbyterian Church of LaGrange Session Minutes. April 9, 1963, LaGrange, GA.

First Presbyterian Church of LaGrange Session Minutes. August 6, 1963, LaGrange, GA.

First Presbyterian Church of LaGrange Session Minutes. February 5, 1963, LaGrange, GA.

First Presbyterian Church of LaGrange Session Minutes. July 6, 1965, LaGrange, GA.

First Presbyterian Church of LaGrange Session Minutes. March 2, 1965, LaGrange, GA.

First Presbyterian Church of LaGrange Session Minutes. March 26, 1964, LaGrange, GA.

First Presbyterian Church of LaGrange Session Minutes. May 22, 1961, LaGrange, GA.

First Presbyterian Church of LaGrange Session Minutes. October 5, 1971, LaGrange, GA.

Flynn, Maria. "U.S. Child Care Crisis Is Holding Back The Workforce." *Forbes*, November 3, 2023. https://www.forbes.com/sites/mariaflynn/2023/11/02/us-child-care-crisis-is-holding-back-the-workforce/.

Friends Center for Children. "Our Story." https://friendscenterforchildren.org/about/our-story/.

Friends Center for Children. "Our Values." https://friendscenterforchildren.org/program/our-values/.

Friends Center for Children. "Teacher Housing Initiative." https://friendscenterforchildren.org/teacher-housing-initiative/.

Fuller E. Callaway Foundation. "History and Heritage." https://www.callawayfoundation.org/history.php.

Georgia State Senate. *Final Report of the Senate Study Committee on Access to Affordable Child Care (SR 471)*. Senate Office of Policy and Legislative Analysis, December 2024.

González, Justo L. *Luke: Belief, A Theological Commentary on the Bible*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010.

Heifetz, Ronald, and Marty Linsky. *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Change.* Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2017.

Jennings, Willie James. *Acts: Belief, A Theological Commentary on the Bible*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017.

Johnson, Forrest Clark, III. "LaGrange." *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, July 12, 2022. https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/counties-cities-neighborhoods/lagrange.

Johnson, Forrest Clark, III, Glenda Ralston Major, and Kaye Lanning Minchew. *Images of America: Troup County*. Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2007.

LaGrange Troup County Chamber of Commerce. "Economic Development." https://www.lagrangechamber.com/work/economic-development/.

Minchew, Kaye Lanning. "Callaway Family." *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, December 29, 2014. https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/callaway-family/.

Nierenbert, Amelia. "One Way to Help Teacher Salaries Go Further: Free Housing." *The New York Times*, September 29, 2023. https://friendscenterforchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/2023_09_29_NYTimes_One_Way_to_Help_Teacher_Salaries_Go_Further_Free_Housing.pdf.

Tickle, Phyllis. *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012.

United for Alice. "About Us; Overview." https://www.unitedforalice.org/overview.

United for Alice. "Meet Alice." https://www.unitedforalice.org/meet-alice.

United for Alice. “Research Center: Georgia.” https://www.unitedforalice.org/state-overview/georgia.

United for Alice. “Research Center: Georgia, County Reports.” https://www.unitedforalice.org/county-reports/georgia.

Van Gelder, Craig, and Dwight Zscheile. *Participating in God’s Mission: A Theological Missiology for the Church in America*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018.

Williams, Arden. “Textile Industry.” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, October 5, 2007. https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/business-economy/textile-industry/.

Williams, Ross. “Proposals to rein in child care costs in Georgia gain early support from Senate leaders.” *Georgia Recorder*, December 13, 2024. https://georgiarecorder.com/briefs/proposals-to-rein-in-child-care-costs-in-georgia-gain-early-support-from-senate-leaders/.

Winn, William W. *The Triumph of the Ecunnau-Nuxulgee*. Macon: Mercer, 2015.