Building Faith and Building Brethren:

Community Development in Philadelphia

1880-1915

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Independent Study
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We are often destitute of the things that life demands,
Want of food and want of shelter,
thirsty hills and barren lands;
We are trusting in the Lord,
and according to God's Word,
We will understand it better by and by.

--- Pastor Charles Tindley, Stanza two of “We’ll Understand it Better By and By”

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Table of Contents

Appendix

> "The Negro churches were the birthplaces of Negro schools and of all agencies which seek to promote the intelligence of the masses; and even to-day no agency serves to disseminate news or information so quickly and effectively among Negroes as the church."
> --- W.E.B. DuBois "The Philadelphia Negro, 1899"

Introduction

Religious congregations are important social institutions that help maintain community stability. Through neighborhood transitions, decline, or redevelopment, congregations can be quintessential service providers and community organizers. Facing neighborhood decline and increasing social problems, many congregations have invested in neighborhoods that the private market has abandoned. In addition to social services, congregations have become important actors in economic development. Successful congregation-affiliated community development corporations have invested millions into their surrounding neighborhoods.

Leveraging resources to benefit distressed communities will continue to be important work for congregations. Neighborhoods with high concentrations of community-serving ministries have lower rates of social issues, including young male unemployment, violence, and substance abuse.[1] Besides caring for the spiritual needs of members, community members not affiliated with the church have access to resources.

Access to social and economic services provided by congregations is especially important to neighborhoods with highly marginalized populations. In *Black Church Outreach* a study of 1044 churches in Philadelphia, Cnaan and Boddie found that most churches offered services to the broader community. However, more Black churches than non-black churches were involved with mentoring, gang member programs, prison ministry,

[1] Ram A. Cnaan and Stephanie Boddie, Black Church Outreach (Philadelphia: CRRUCS, 2001) 24.

computer training, clothing closets, health education, substance abuse programs, and sex education. Congregations provide services in the neighborhood right where they are needed. Therefore, the involvement of Black churches in community development activities should not be overlooked. Unlike other social institutions, churches have the moral and religious responsibility to help those in need and to engage the larger community. The scale of church outreach depends on several factors including size, financial resources, and leadership. Regardless of involvement levels, historic and current contributions to community development activities have just begun to be fully realized.

Involvement in community and economic development has historical roots in the earliest African-American church. Obligated to address physical and spiritual needs, African-American congregations were involved in community development long before emancipation or establishment of the safety net system. Operating in more oppressive times, with nominal political power and economic resources, community developers have much to learn from the innovative programs of the early Black church.

Historical research into the early activities of African-American congregations is needed to fully appreciate their contributions over time. Just as the position of African-Americans in the United States has changed, the church has continually adjusted to the needs of their community. In *The Philadelphia Negro*, the study of Philadelphia's seventh ward, W.E.B . DuBois recognized the central role of churches in the lives of Black Philadelphians. Community programs were viewed as both a duty of a church and as a responsibility to the race. This research aims to supplement the information provided by DuBois to uncover the magnitude of service the Black Church provided. This study is only a small sample of the social programs of Black churches during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Further

research is needed to fully catalog the immense amount of investment historic and current Black churches contribute to their communities. Philadelphia's historic congregations were chosen to study for several reasons including:

- Analysis by DuBois
- The large African-American population in Philadelphia
- Origin of first African-American churches (for certain denominations)[2]

Initially, all of the churches included were historically located in the seventh ward. However, further research revealed many significant churches were located right outside the seventh ward, being equally accessible to residents. Mother Zoar African Methodist and Berean Presbyterian Churches are also included in the study because of their historical importance and community development activities (see appendix for list of churches and locations).

Background

Philadelphia was transforming rapidly during the 1896-1897 period of the DuBois study. The overall condition of Blacks was still poor and extremely overcrowded, however their collective economic power was notable. By that time, a few churches like Zoar, Mother Bethel, and St. Thomas were already over a hundred years old. Other congregations also shared in the prosperity and growth of the Black population after emancipation. Between 1890 and 1900, Black inhabitants grew by 59 percent in the city to 62, 613. By 1910, Black population increased to 84,459.[3] The 7th ward was home to the majority of Blacks during

[2] Zoar, Bethel, First African Presbyterian were first African-American churches of their denomination in the country; Wesley, St.Thomas, St. Peter Claver, and First African Baptist were first of their denomination in Philadelphia.

[3] Gary B. Nash, Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community,1720-1840 *(*Cambridge,

this time, but movement out of the ward to North and West Philadelphia was already beginning. As migrants from the South and the Caribbean made Philadelphia home, churches had to respond to the influx. [4]

The proliferation of African-American churches during the late nineteenth century is a testament to the growth in population, as well as economic strength. More churches were constructed or purchased between 1880 and 1890 than ever before. Church distribution around the city also shows movement outside of the 7th ward. In 1857, no Black church was farther than fifteen blocks from Mother Bethel; ten churches were within a 2 block radius. By 1892, only one church was within 2 blocks of Bethel.[5] With the exception of St. Thomas and Mother Bethel, most churches drew their membership within a 5 block radius of the church. Following their parishioners, black congregations had to locate within walking distance of homes.

Relocation or construction was also prompted by an enlarging congregation. By moving with the population and increasing in size, the churches had the power to raise vast amounts of funds to build these churches. At least twenty-four Black congregations were built between 1888 and 1910 ranging from $25,000 to $40,000 (lot purchase price not included). Architecturally, these new churches were similar in style and grandeur of white churches.[6] Well respected architecture firms were commissioned to design the edifices and many of the churches are now on the national or city directory of historic places.

MA: Harvard University Press, 1988) 273.

[4] Ralph H. Jones, Charles Albert Tindley: Prince of Preachers (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982) 55. St. Peter Claver Roman Catholic Records & Photographs: Matrimoniorum Registorium 1897-1915, in the American Negro Historical Society Collection at Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

[5] The Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia, From Refugee to Strength: Rise to Prominence,1880-1916 www.preservationalliance.com

[6] The Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia, From Refugee to Strength: Rise to Prominence,1880-1916 www.preservationalliance.com

Building churches of great size and employing fine architects was viewed as the greatness of God and the progress of the race. Pride in their leadership and inter-denominational rivalry became so prevalent that purchasing churches attracted less fanfare. For example, Union Baptist did not want to "buy any secondhand church from a white congregation" but wanted to build a church that would surpass any other in Philadelphia and hold their 2,000 members comfortably.[7] Church construction not only accommodated exponential growth, but placed African-American churches on par with white churches for the first time. Less than one hundred years after forming their modest churches, St. Thomas, Mother Bethel, and other Black churches had the financial ability to become a visible presence in the city.

Church Construction and Purchases 1880-1910

Church	Year	Architect/Firms
First African Baptist	1902	Watson and Huckel
First African Presbyterian (purchase)	1891	Samuel Sloan
Mother Zoar (rebuilt)*	1887	Charles M. Talley
Union Baptist	1893	David Smith Gendell
Holy Trinity Baptist	1892	Hazelhurst and Huckel
Berean Presbyterian**	1890	
St. Thomas	1890	Thomas Francis Miller
Mother Bethel**	1889	Hazelhurst and Huckel
Church of the Crucifixion	1902	Durhing, Okie, & Ziegler
St. Peter Claver Rectory* St. Peter Claver School	1896 1908	Edwin Forrest Durang R. Boyle

Source: Philadelphia Architects & Buildings, www.philadelphiabuildings.org
* On the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places
**On National Register of Historic Places

[7] Ralph H. Jones, Charles Albert Tindley: Prince of Preachers (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982) 70.

> "He was born a slave; his young ideas, therefore, were never taught how to shoot forth their rays of intellectual light and beauty. He had arrived at manhood before he was initiated into the first branches of a common school education. He became somewhat proficient in these by the dint of self-application, during intervals from his secular labors."
>
> --- description of Absalom Jones by Rev. Douglass, "The Afro-American Group of the Episcopal Church"

Legacy of the Forefathers

Examining African-American church history within a select time period is almost impossible without understanding the legacy and struggles of the founding members. All of the churches within the study were founded before 1900 and 12 are still operating congregations. Especially in Philadelphia, the struggles of black congregations to begin and maintain themselves are an important piece of American history.

For many denominations, the history of African-American congregations starts in Philadelphia. The First African Presbyterian Church founded in 1807 is the first Black Presbyterian church in the country. St. Thomas ordained the first the Black Episcopalian priest, Absalom Jones and the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) denomination was started by Richard Allen in 1794. The leaders of these churches faced countless obstacles from being denied official recognition by the white dominated denominations to operating in a racist and violent city.[8]

Leading clergy during the time of DuBois' study are also inspiring figures because of their dedication and struggles. Not only did they persevere, but their leadership contributed greatly to neighborhoods in Philadelphia. During the study period of 1880-1915, two pastors

[8] Black churches were many times delayed official recognition from white denominations. Church of the Crucifixion was denied recognition for its first twelve years (Bragg, 112).

exemplify the religious leadership in the city. Matthew Anderson, founder of Berean Presbyterian, obtained formal education at Oberlin and Princeton University. The full scholarship and comfortable accommodations promised by Princeton quickly changed when he arrived. Surprised at the Black man standing in front of them, his room was changed to a broom closet in the basement.[9] Despite the discomfort and hostile conditions, Anderson graduated with a doctorate of divinity and eventually came to Philadelphia.

Likewise, Charles Albert Tindley, Pastor of Bainbridge St. Methodist, also overcame hardship.[10] Born to a slave father and free mother, he was hired out to do odd jobs at a young age. Tindley taught himself to read by gathering scraps of newsprint and was constantly seeking education. Starting with the menial job of sexton, he studied to pass the Methodist examinations to become a preacher although he never obtained a high school degree. Returning to the Bainbridge St. Church to become pastor, he used his preaching and musical skills to grow the congregation to over 10,000 members.

Charles Tindley was referred to as the "Prince of Preachers" and is called the Father of Gospel music.[11] His songs were released in several books of music including *Gospel Pearls*, which first coins the term gospel music. Tindley also wrote "*Stand By Me*" in 1905 and "*I'll Overcome Someday"* in 1900. This gospel song became the basis of the Civil Rights anthem *"We Shall Overcome"*. Gospel songs written by Tindley have become classics for a range of denominations and five are included in the United Methodist Hymnal.

[9] Matthew Anderson, Presbyterianism. Its Relation to the Negro (Philadelphia: The Sunshine Press, 1897).
[10] The Church name has changed from John Wesley Methodist (1839-81), to Bainbridge St. (1881-1906), to East Calvary (1906-24) and is currently named Tindley Temple.
[11] Tindley's tremendous singing, writing, preaching, and political connections earned him this nickname from fellow clergy during his pastorship (Jones, 48).

Provision for the Physical and Spiritual

Critical educational and financial services were provided by African-American churches in Philadelphia and around the country. Mainstream financial services did not cater to Black people, including banks, insurance companies, mutual relief societies, and business associations. Beneficial and mutual relief societies were popular among all Philadelphians well into the 20th century. Societies were church-based, private, or created by occupation. Understandably, the lack of job security, poor conditions, and dominance of African-Americans in domestic and service occupations almost required membership in a mutual relief society. Most African-Americans were involved with more than one to achieve the highest benefit. By 1837, these societies operated in almost every neighborhood and at least eighty percent of Black adults were members.

Although useful, the attraction of insurance societies led to unscrupulous business practices. Both native Philadelphians and newcomers were being scammed by fraudulent insurance companies and societies. In response, churches began forming their own; St. Thomas was the first Black church to form a mutual relief society in Philadelphia.[12] The Society of the Sons of St. Thomas was formed in 1796 as a member only unemployment, disability, and death insurance society. This society was highly selective about its membership and required character references from current members. A twenty dollar death benefit was paid to the members' legal representative upon death.[13] Typically, unemployment and sick benefits were handled this way:

> No member shall be entitled to relief unless he has been a member twelve months, and paid all his dues from that time. If after the expiration of that period, sickness

[12] Most churches had two mutual relief (insurance) societies, one for males and one for females.
[13] The William Dorsey Collection, Scrapbook #25. Constitution and By-Laws of the Society of the Sons of St. Thomas,1862. Cheney University

> shall prevent his pursuing his trade or occupation, he shall receive three dollars per week for nine weeks, after which, should his sickness continue, he shall be allowed one dollar and fifty cents per week, for three months, and if sick for a longer period, he shall receive one dollar during his sickness.

Not all societies operated in the same manner (dues, memberships, or rules) but the Sons of St. Thomas provides a typical example of church societies. As the predecessor to all the others, St. Thomas was the model for all societies affiliated with religious institutions.

Church-based Financial and Asset-building Activities

Church	Building & Loan	Savings & Loan	Societies
Berean Presbyterian*	▲	▲	▲
Church of the Crucifixion*	▲	▲	▲
First African Baptist*	▲		▲
First African Presbyterian*	▲		
Mother African Zoar	▲***	▲*	
Mother Bethel*	▲	▲	▲
St. Peter Claver*			▲
St. Thomas*	▲		▲
Bainbridge St. (Tindley Temple)**	▲		▲
Wesley*			▲

* In existence by 1900 **In existence before 1915 ***After 1915

Church-based mutual relief societies were the first forays into asset-building activities but would not be the last.[14] African-American churches also wanted to address other barriers to economic prosperity. Even though deposits could be made by Blacks at major banks, these institutions would not allow people of African descent to obtain business loans or mortgages. Churches began creating their own Building and Loan Associations. They were created to give Black Philadelphians greater opportunities to own property, especially homes.

[14] The members' death benefit acted as life insurance, social security benefit, or inheritance.

Berean's Building and Loan Association financed 43 homes ($52,000 in assets) from 1888 to 1897.[15] Similarly, Saving and Loan institutions were created to retain Black economic power in the neighborhood. Both community residents and church members gravitated towards these banks. The longest operating African-American bank in the United States was Berean Federal Savings Bank, which served the community from 1888 to 2000. Other church-based Savings and Loans are currently credit unions (Mother Bethel and Zoar).

Benevolent societies were often created by those who recognized a need and had the fundraising capabilities. Operating like small non-profits, the members would raise funds to serve community needs. Many of the African-American societies were church-based or affiliated. The first known Black benevolent society was The Free African Society formed in 1787. While men were always involved in societies that aided the church, women were extremely involved with affairs external to the church. For example, the Dorcas Society was formed to provide clothing for poor Black children to attend school (they also raised money for fugitive slaves before emancipation). [16] St. Thomas Ladies Sanitary Association raised money and collected donations to distribute food and supplies to soldiers, and the infirm.

Education

Historic Black Churches were also concerned about secular and religious educational opportunities for youth and adults. Sabbath school was customary on Sundays, but general education was a priority as well. Public schooling for children was restricted by segregation, economic status, and the availability of Black-only schools. The first parochial school for African-American children in Philadelphia was operated by the St. Peter Claver Roman

[15] Matthew Anderson, Presbyterianism. Its Relation to the Negro (Philadelphia: The Sunshine Press, 1897), 41.
[16] Illusions to abolitionist activities and fundraising are within primary documents, but care was taken to avoid incrimination.

Catholic Church in 1887. Originally, the mission was founded by the Colored Sisters of Providence from Maryland. Katherine Drexel and other prominent Philadelphians contributed funds to help purchase the church building in 1892 and fund the school. First African Baptist was also involved in youth education, founding the Downingtown Industrial School in 1904.[17] The school was used primarily as a boarding school but also accepted evening students.

Berean's influence on education has even outlasted its Savings Bank. The Berean Manual and Industrial School was formed in 1889 to prepare African-Americans to meet social and industrial changes. The school was open to all denominations and races; however he was especially concerned with the masses of untrained southern migrants. After training, many graduates would work at Wanamaker's Department Store (a prominent downtown Philadelphia department store directly across from City Hall). John Wanamaker and many other donors shared Anderson's vision of job training as a way for economic progress.[18] Eventually, the Industrial school evolved into Berean Business College offering Associate's degrees and is currently known as Berean Institute. The church also operated the first pre-school and kindergarten program sponsored by the state of Pennsylvania for Blacks in the city. Formed in 1884, the Berean Public Kindergarten provided classes for three hours daily and was sustained largely with private contributions and 25 cent per month fee until obtaining the state contract.[19]

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[17] Vincent P. Franklin, The Education of Black Philadelphia: The Social and Educational History of a Minority Community,1900-1950 *(* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979) 177.

[18] Matthew Anderson, Presbyterianism. Its Relation to the Negro (Philadelphia: The Sunshine Press, 1897).Wanamaker also was close to Charles Tindley, providing financial advise and assistance to Bainbridge St. Methodist (Jones, 99).

[19] Matthew Anderson, Presbyterianism. Its Relation to the Negro (Philadelphia: The Sunshine Press, 1897). 40.

Other Community Services

In addition to financial and education services, Black churches also provided an impressive combination of social services. Segregation and other discriminatory policies forced churches to intercede for their communities, mostly without government support. Funding for these programs was solicited from denominational bodies, private donations, and internal fundraisers.

DuBois cites Berean Presbyterian and Church of the Crucifixion (Episcopalian) as being most active in the social betterment of colored people. In 1847, Crucifixion was deliberately founded close to the worst slums in the city, where people were "extremely poor and wretched as to physical comforts, and, if possible, more destitute of moral and spiritual advantages" (Bragg 111). They sponsored a Coal Club, Free Ice Fund, parish kindergarten, the Crucifixion Insurance Society, penny savings bank, and vacation bible school.[20] The Progressive Workingmen's Club was acquired in 1878 to provide recreation and gym facilities to young men in the neighborhood. A Penitentiary Service was also established to uplift the inmates of Eastern State Penitentiary and Moyamensing Jail. With assistance of white benefactors, Crucifixion and the other Episcopalian churches established the Home for the Homeless and The House of St. Michael's and All Angels (a home for disabled colored children).[21] The Church of the Crucifixion also hosted University Extension Lectures a few times per year as a benefit to neighborhood residents.

Berean's activities also expanded beyond educational and financial services. Services included the Boys' Cadet Corps which was a boy-scout type troupe with uniforms and a band

[20] Roger Lane, William Dorsey's Philadelphia and ours : on the Past and Future of the Black City in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

[21] Home for the Homeless provided lodging and training for women and children. It also supplied meals for transients, temporary lodgers, inmates, and the disabled. The House of the Holy Child and St. Mary's School for Girls were established through efforts of African-American Episcopalians.

(membership required attendance at Sabbath school and one service per week). Additionally, through a donation from M.M. Barber, Berean acquired property on the Jersey Shore and operated it as a retreat. The first class Berean Cottage was located in Point Pleasant, New Jersey and operated as a modestly priced summer resort for colored people. Only one block from the beach, the cottage shielded African-Americans from "being subject to insults, insinuations, and refusals which they [met] with, at nearly every summer resort" in the country (Anderson, 44). Provision of services and social amenities like Berean Cottage are too important to take for granted. It shows that churches were conscious of the needs and injustices the community was facing. From feeding and housing the homeless in the auditorium of East Calvary to the First African Presbyterian Church Spelling Bee, the church was integral in social, political, and religious life of Black Philadelphians.

Conclusion

As a student of urban planning and history, the role of churches in community development means more than the fulfillment of moral obligations. Many times, congregations maintain their commitment to the community and are one of the few remaining social institutions in distressed areas.[22] As "one of the last to go" in poverty-stricken neighborhoods, congregations can act as a catalyst in increasing stability in the community.

The community development activities of the churches during the 19th century and of current congregations are similar in scope and purpose. Basic welfare, education, childcare, job training, and asset-building needs continue to be met by congregations. Why are

[22] Nancy T. Kinney and William E. Winter "Places of Worship and Neighborhood Stability" Journal of Urban Affairs, (Vol. 28, No.4, 2006) 335-352.

congregations providing the same services over two hundred years after the first African-American church was founded? Neighborhood residents still have needs that are not being met by social welfare programs or other government services. Even with grants and other subsidies, churches provide the same services in a less expensive way. Calculations for replacement value of their services must take property costs, volunteer time, and program costs into account. Replacement costs of services provided by congregations in Philadelphia are over $2.3 million annually.[23]

Even though debates over federal funding for Faith-based Initiatives rages, congregations have been providing services long before the program was instituted or theories of neighborhood investment formulated. The innovative activities of congregations, like asset-building and job training, have become basics in the field. Further examination into historical community development may help inform new strategies for engaging and revitalizing marginalized neighborhoods.

Methodology

Research for this independent study was conducted using various sources. Primary books, church documents, and information from historical societies were used to compile community development actives in the churches. Data was collected from church archives, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Presbyterian Historical Society, Temple Urban Archives, Cheyney University Library (Rare Books Collection), and the University of Pennsylvania Library.

[23] Ram A. Cnaan and Stephanie Boddie, Black Church Outreach (Philadelphia: CRRUCS, 2001) 24.

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- Philadelphia Architects and Buildings http://www.philadelphiabuildings.org
- First African Presbyterian Church http://www.brynmawr.edu/cities/archx/05-600/proj/p2/jcecb/FirstAfrican_rev.html
- Church and Community: The Berean Enterprise Online Exhibit http://www.history.pcusa.org/exhibits/berean/

Appendix

I. Churches within the Study

Name	Denomination	Present	Historical Address
Allen Chapel	AME	n/a	2nd & Christian St., Lombard & 19th
Tindley Temple	Methodist	Broad & Fitzwater	Bainbridge St. & 8th, Bainbridge & 11th
Berean	Presbyterian	2101 N. Broad St.	1906 S. College Ave.
Beth Eden	Baptist	n/a	Broad & Spruce
Lombard Central Church	Presbyterian	4201 Powelton Ave	Lombard & 9th St.
Central Church	Presbyterian	n/a	
Church of the Covenant	M.E.	n/a	18th & Spruce St.
Church of the Crucifixion	Episcopal	620 S. 8th St.	same
Church of the Mediator	Unknown	n/a	Lombard & 19th St.
Crittenton Florence	Unknown	n/a	322 S. 7th St.
First African	Presbyterian	4159 W Girard Ave	7th & Bainbridge
Grace Union Church	UAME	n/a	15th & Lombard St.
Holy Trinity Colored	Baptist	1816-24 Bainbridge	same
Holy Trinity Memorial	Episcopal	2212 Spruce St.	same
Pitman	M.E.	n/a	23rd & Lombard St.
Mission of the Covenant to Israel	Presbyterian	n/a	735 Lombard St.
Mother Bethel	AME	419 S. 6th St.	same
St. Peter Claver	Roman Catholic	12th & Lombard St.	same
St. Sauveur	Unknown	22nd & Delancy St.	n/a
St. Thomas	Episcopal	6361 Lancaster Ave.	5th & Walnut, 52nd & Parrish
Salem	M.E.	n/a	7th & Lombard
Second Wesley, "Little Wesley"	AMEZ	Hurst & Lombard St.	Shippen St.*
Shiloh	Baptist	2040 Christian St.	Clifton & Cedar St., Lombard & 11th St.
Wesley	AMEZ	1500 Lombard St.	Lombard & 5th St.
Wylie Memorial	Presbyterian	315 S. Broad St.	Broad & Spruce St.
Zoar	M.E.	1204 Melon St.	4th & Brown St.

* The street name Shippen is currently known as Bainbridge St.

II. Churches on Historic Registries

National & Philadelphia Register

Mother Bethel AME
Wesley AMEZ
Berean Presbyterian

Philadelphia Register

Shiloh Baptist
Mother Zoar Methodist
St. Peter Claver
Lombard Central Presbyterian