



New York State  
COUNCIL OF CHURCHES



## Welcome to “Who is My Neighbor?”

1. Reach out to their neighborhoods and cities and use all their gifts to bless their “parish”
2. General preparation your congregation must make to use its property to serve the community including the construction of affordable housing
3. Understanding and changing land use laws and policies and working with neighbor resistance
4. Accessing pre-development funding
5. Hearing example of how congregations better use their property and be more financially sustainable and partner with others
6. Understanding how congregation’s shape communities which are racially and economically integrated rather than gentrified and segregated.

# Who is My Neighbor?



- The Bible is full of stories of how we are to love our neighbor. In the Hebrew Bible, we find the Shema which is representation in the Gospels. The Shema calls on us to love God with all of our heart mind and soul and in the same way to love our neighbors as ourselves. In the Hebrew Bible, it says in **Leviticus 19:18** You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD. In Gospel of Luke we find the familiar story of the Good Samaritan **Luke 10:25 to 37**
- **The Parable of the Good Samaritan**
- Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. ‘Teacher,’ he said, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ He said to him, ‘What is written in the law? What do you read there?’ He answered, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.’ And he said to him, ‘You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.’
- But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbour?’ Jesus replied, ‘A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, “Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.” Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?’ He said, ‘The one who showed him mercy.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do likewise.’

Historically we discover God when we reach out to our communities



In the Medieval period, the cathedral was at the center of the community. The cathedral was a gathering place for the community but it also facilitated and spawned economic activity and social connection all around it.





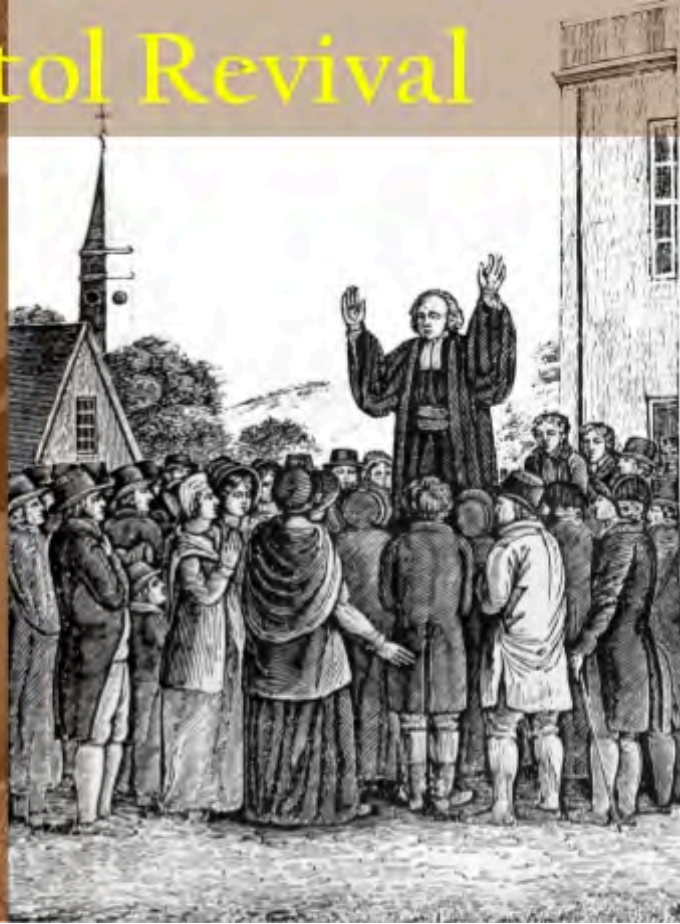


In New England, we can find Congregationalists, rebelling against the King of England, forming towns which according to the law at the time required that a congregation or meeting house be constructed before a town could be formed. Often these meeting houses were on town greens where people grazed their sheep, schooled their children and engaged in commerce.

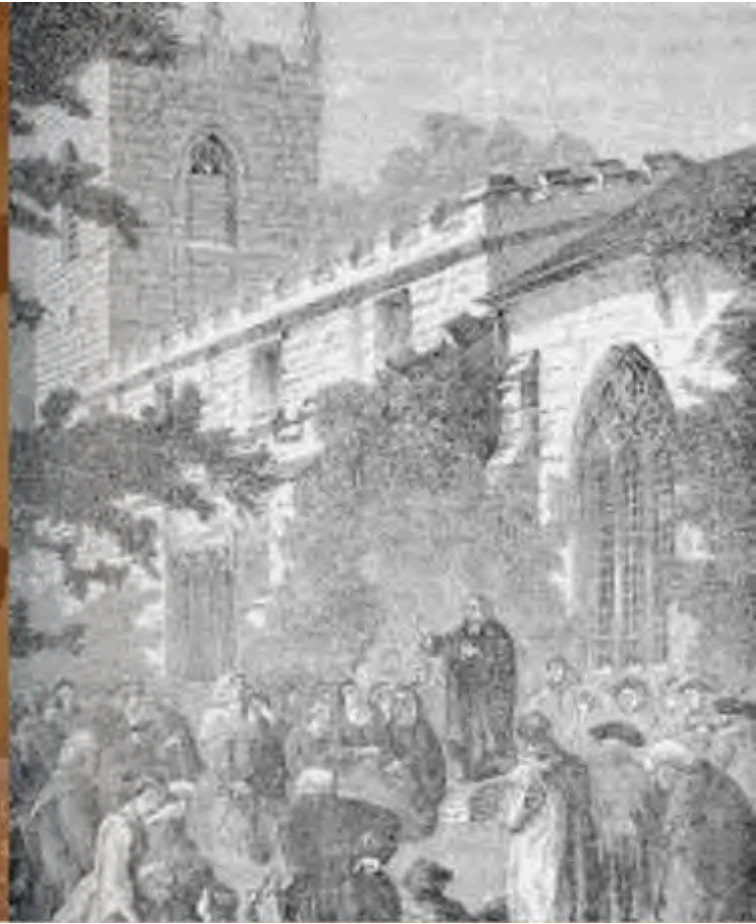


# The Bristol Revival

As Whitefield returned to England he found himself barred from London pulpits and began preaching in the open to coal miners near Bristol.



This experience at Bristol transformed John Wesley into an Evangelist who would now focus on proclaiming Salvation and Holiness to the lower classes and to the unchurched.



In England, it became increasingly the case in the view of some, that the Church of England, including cathedrals, was becoming more disconnected from the community. The church came to be seen as a bastion of exclusivity or a symbol of privilege and oppression populated aristocracy and a clergy class over and against lower class people like coal miners for instance.

Methodism had its birth when John Wesley rebelled against the increasing lack of community orientation of the Church of England, and took the church out into the streets to offer the gospel in open air settings to the underclass especially after being barred from preaching in London's pulpits because of his identification with the poor and the excluded.



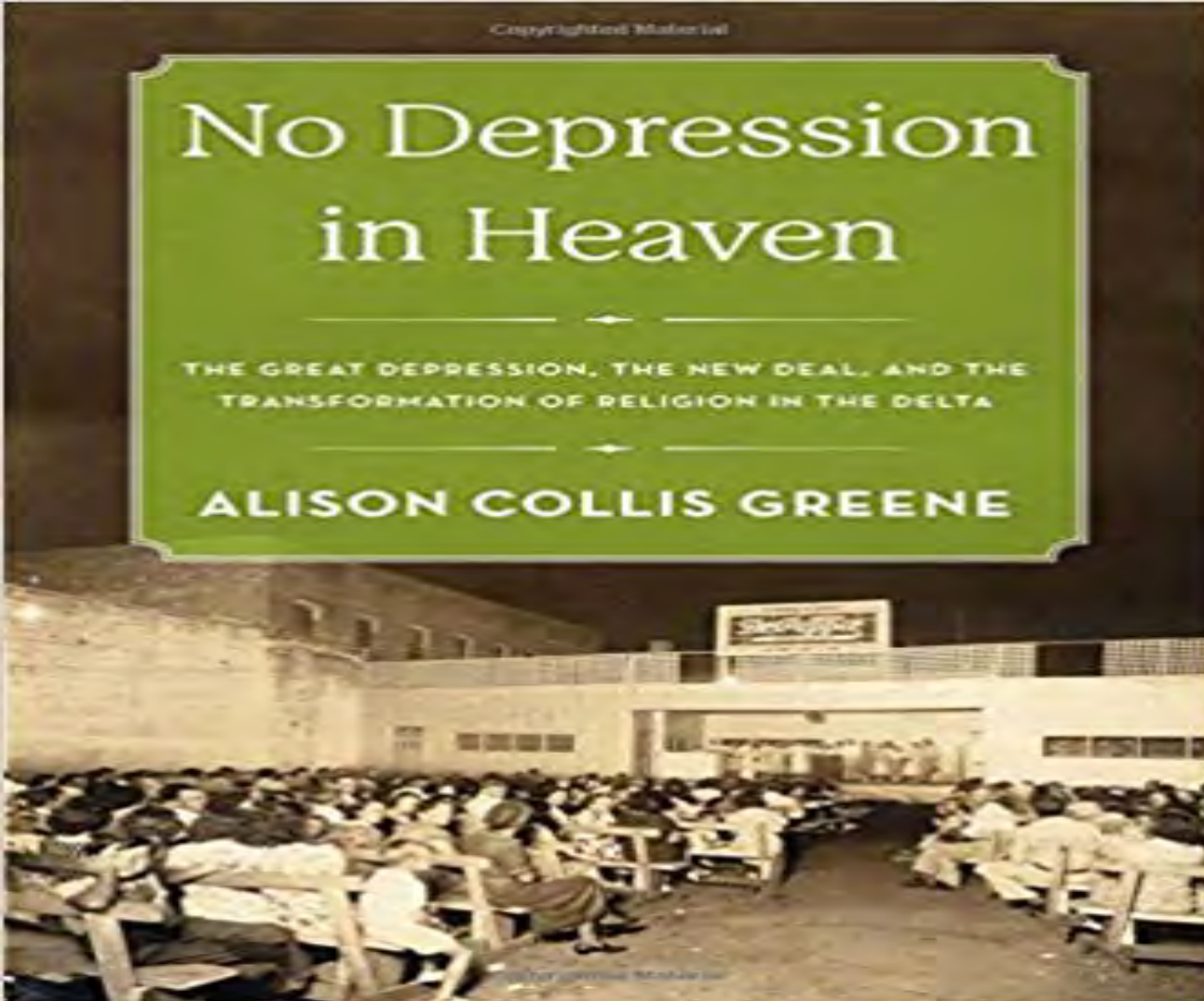


In the United States, you see the advent of camp meetings sponsored by Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians and others where “church” happened out in the community sometimes as part of summer revivals.





In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, The Social Gospel, which had some of its origins in upstate New York, embraced the idea that the church was not so much about converting individuals to accept Jesus. The church, instead, offered the Gospel by changing the society to make it more welcoming to children and the outcast. The work of the church was social conversion.



During the Great Depression, in every part of the country. and in the Mississippi Delta, congregations came up against the reality that they could not dispense charity alone. Instead, they sought to advocate for the New Deal and for Government responsibility in offering a safety net.





After World War II, which was a hey day for religious life in the United States, there was a building boom for religious institutions. We added religious education space to accommodate families which wanted to come to church to build community, socialize, and raise their children in the faith. These spaces were not really designed to serve the community but to serve the membership coming to a congregation as social destination. We designed these buildings accordingly. The classroom became the picture of community outreach and was the vehicle for socialization. In some ways, congregations became exclusive enclaves representing the segregated neighborhoods in which they dwelled like this church in Levittown which offered home ownership to white people but not black people seeking to reestablish themselves after World War II





Faith communities of the 1950's, in some respects, forgot the edgy nature social outreach, commitment to communal space, the social gospel, and the new deal and was more captivated by a vision of a suburban church obsessed with the idea that the church is there to serve it's members who come to church and not others folks who had their own religious lane. It reinforced a view that will be better off and stronger if we attract people like us. Congregational life was shaped by a distorted societal narrative that tells us that segregation leads to stable communities and economic security. These sorted out congregations created a footprint for the subsequent church growth movement which in its early stages was based on the idea that we will thrive if we attract people "like us" who will feel at home in our churches.

Some congregations aspired to become entertainment centers seeking to do better and better productions to attract people. In the process, however, our congregations became more and disconnected from our community. It was impossible for so many congregations to live up to the physical and financial requirements of being a mega church.





But the 50's attraction model increasingly had many members flocking to our churches, we saw the churches become more about locked doors, fences and "no trespassing" signs to preserve the building and protect the church from the community. We end up projecting a message of church as some sort of religious country club and buildings designed to enforce this exclusivity. instead of a message of hospitality the was only church open a few hours a week and locked up and under utilized for the rest of the week for fear of opening it up for the community. We now have deteriorating property and shrinking memberships without the wherewithal to keep the church going.





During the pandemic, it turns out our buildings were not used at all. We have become obsessed with reopening them. But in the meantime, congregations have discovered that they need to reconnect with their original social gospel mission to worry more about the welfare of their communities which need the church's witness, presence and advocacy for the society we want. If we want to deal with the pandemic and the ensuing economic and social crisis, the 50's model of church which we have been worshipping in one form or another has come to its end. Some are mourning this loss, but perhaps, the pandemic is forcing congregations to re-connect with its origins and revitalize by serving the people in the community instead serving itself and its shrinking members many who are reluctant to come back to the building to resume business as usual.



- As our buildings emptied, we have started to look anew at the barriers we have constructed to appeal to groups of people who are just like us. We have had to confront our fear of immigrants, or people of different races or nationalities, or those who are low income. We must reconsider how we include people who are re-entering our communities after being in prison. Our design of neighborhoods and cities to segregate and disconnect through exclusionary zoning, red-lining, one-acre zoning, low density housing gets called into question.
- Gentrification and creating credit deserts where people cannot access affordable capital is also challenged.
- These old patterns of doing community and challenged in much the same way old pattern of doing church are challenged. We can no longer create what Mindy Fullilove calls the sorted-out city. If we believe physical and relational connection give life, that makes a community vital, it is clear why the "sorting out" of our communities is a huge problem which must be addressed.




## KEYS TO REVITALIZATION

Faith Communities if they are to revitalize must look outward. The pandemic has shown us that we will die if we look inward. In a time such as this, God is calling us to reclaim some old concepts from reviving the central place of cathedrals and meeting house and camp meetings, to caring for people in the streets, to buildings which must be repurposed to be more public space.

We will literally die unless we reach out to others and contribute to the welfare of our society.

If we are to revitalize, we must remember that our whole neighborhood, our city, our state community is our parish.

We need to invest in relationships in our neighborhood and town with people who may or may not end up coming to our congregations. We must care about the whole and show up often.





In general, the source of our renewal is rooted less about attracting people and self-preservation. It's not really about coming to my church. It's about getting out into a community to know our neighbors. It's finding the church outside its four walls. It's important to remember that everyone in our community is part of our congregation--Jesus will not let us put anyone in the category "not my problem" even if they are not members of your congregation. This includes people who are homeless, returning from prison, undocumented, refugees, disabled, etc. We must reclaim the neighborhood as our "parish". Everyone in the community is a "member" of your congregation, whether or not they attend worship or give a pledge. We advocate for connection, relationship, common ground by showing up in unlikely places in the community and connecting neighbors to each other.

- As we engage in relationships and actively participate in shaping the future of our community, opportunities will become more apparent to us about how to use your property to bless your community, At the same time we may discover ways to address your congregations financial and maintenance challenges. To use Jesus' words, if you lose your life for the gospel and care for your neighbor you will find your life. If you try to first save your life, you will lose it. **When we participate in our neighborhoods and our cities, we build trust and we grow together.**





Mindy Fullilove tells us that we improve the mental health of a community by facilitating connections between different people. In theological terms, we discover joy from loving our neighbor or another way to put it, in Christian terms, we find the Christ through the relationships we build with one another.

# Congregations Revitalize when they:

Move from an inward to an outward focus. Self giving relationships rather than transactional relationships matter

Advocate for policies, laws, communal practices which include people in their community.

When we build relationships and advocate for the world that God wants in the public square, possibilities for best use of property become apparent.



# SO WHAT DO WE SEE?

## Prayer Walk

### *How To Pray:*

- Ideally, find a friend or two to walk with you.
- Walk the streets of your neighborhood, silently praying for each person, each house.
- Pray for specific needs if you know them, or just pray for God's truth and blessings for each person.
- Pray walking should be low-profile. You don't need to carry a Bible, pray out loud or tell everyone what you're doing. Just quietly pray as you walk.











In many cities, we have large neighborhoods where the houses were allowed to go into decline because the homeowners were not able to get the loans to fix up their housing because they live in a neighborhood which was seen as a credit risk or because of people's race. Others left their homes because their factories closed and no one had the money to buy them. Other times these neighborhoods become unlivable because of toxic waste or there are trucks which emit terrible fumes which give the residents cancer.





In more semi rural areas, we have shopping malls left empty. 8,800 shopping malls in the United States are virtually empty. Meanwhile the poor people who live near by live in fairly-substandard housing or they are homeless.





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Some of us might be sequestered in a suburban home where we pull into our garage into our little oasis but we barely can even say the names of our neighbors because we rarely interact with them. Meanwhile, there are people who are couch surfing just down the street because they don't have the money for rent.





Others purchase expensive condos but barely live in them while others who live in its shadows have no place to live. In this building, a billionaire hedge fund manager from Chicago bought the most expensive condo in the world for 228 million. This building probably has a relatively high vacancy rate. 1 in 4 luxury condos in New York City are vacant. In the meantime, there are families like this who can't find home because there is a massive shortage of affordable homes.

- There are policies, laws, attitudes around land use and welcome which can either include the people in your city or exclude them. The faith community must be willing to name these policies, and exercise their voice in the public square to change those policies and attitudes
- Not in My Backyard movements
- Gentrification and displacement
- Zoning Laws which make it impossible to build higher density housing
- Practices of Real Estate agents to steer people to certain neighborhoods based on race
- Processes that exclude certain voices from being heard about the community they want
- Policies making childcare, health care, housing and quality education inaccessible.





Congregations must do four things. 1) They must build relationships with people in their neighborhood and bring people together. 2) It means working with government officials to help advocate. Here is a picture of our new Attorney General announcing a grant for a community which wants to build affordable housing. 3) They need to counter prejudice where it appropriate. 3) They must hold up a vision for what is possible. And In many cases, 4) it means using their own property to build affordable housing.





One positive vision for community design which includes everyone might mean going out into our neighborhoods to actively think about how we design our neighborhoods so they are humane, welcoming and racially and economically inclusive. I like this example of an exercise of planning together.





Find ways right away to start thinking about how to open up your space and let the community in. This is Judson Memorial Church in New York, which decided to remove the pews from its sanctuary so it could be a more open space that could be used the whole week.









Here is Isaiah's Table in Syracuse, This is a project of the Presbyterian Church. It is a community meeting space, garden and arts center in very poor part of town.





St. Marks Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Bushwick neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York build 20 affordable units right into their old church structure.





Mercy House designed by Bethesda Episcopal Church in Saratoga Springs. Mercy House will serve as a homeless shelter, transitional housing, and housing for Backstretch workers



This a development in Bedford, New York initiated by Antioch Baptist Church. The City of Bedford was sued for not building enough affordable housing. They worked with the church to provide money to build 16 apartments which in part incorporated the façade of the church





This is a large affordable housing development initiated by First Presbyterian Church, Jamaica Plain. Called Tree of Life, this project includes many affordable housing units, a medical clinic and bank. Proceeds from this development in part were used to renovate the church on the left.





This project is in the Bronx in New York City. This was built by tearing down an old unused United Methodist Church to build a structure for seniors including 45 units for people who a very income with special needs including elderly who were previously incarcerated. This project was initiated by the United Methodist City Society in collaboration with the developer Bronx Pro.







This church in Washington DC retained their church structure but built affordable housing on the back of their existing church structure.





This is Chapel Garden Senior Apartments which was initiated by the St. Johns United Church of Christ in Waukegan, Illinois. This deal was put together when the church formed a separate corporation to pair with a developer to build 22 units of housing for seniors and people with disabilities using government funds including low income housing tax credits, a low interest government loan, a commercial loan, Federal Home Loan Bank money and a HOME Funds



This is a supportive housing development built by Community Housing Innovations in White Plains. This is an affordable housing development for people who are previously homeless





This is a brand new affordable housing development in Saratoga Springs, New York built by a developer called Intrada. In this development, 20 units have been set aside for young people who aged out of foster care.





This is Long Pond Affordable Housing Development which was initiated by Greece Baptist Church. They willed five acres of green space towards a large development which houses senior citizens using a variety of affordable housing programs.





Heritage Gardens, an inclusive apartment complex, sits on the 4 acres across from the Pieters Family Life Center. It offers 84 apartments for people who are income-eligible. Seventeen of those are reserved for people supported by the Office for Persons with Developmental Disabilities. The complex includes six apartments that are fully accessible but all units are easily adaptable.



Geva Theatre and Pathstone Corporation will team up to develop a 54-unit affordable housing project at the corner of Monroe Avenue and Howell and Savannah streets. Commercial space will be on the ground floor which Geva says it will use for practice space and year-round creativity classes.