The economic crisis of 2007 struck communities dependent on the home building industry particularly hard. Grace Church in Coral Gables, Florida represents many churches serving communities traumatized by high rates of home foreclosure and unemployment. Large congregations such as Grace Church are repositories of the collected resources of communities. In moments of anxiety owing to systemic and long-term challenges, large congregations feel called to help lead their communities in efforts to plan for a more hopeful future.

Profile of Grace Church
Grace Church is a large congregation consisting mostly of working class individuals and families who meet at three campuses in Cape Coral and Fort Myers, Florida. In particular, the congregation is concerned with helping people in the community overcome drug and alcohol addiction, as well as other forms of addiction, depression, anxiety, and physical and emotional abuse. It runs a successful Friday evening program known as “Celebrate Recovery,” which is modeled on other recovery programs offered by large churches around the country. The universal need for recovery is a fundamental element of the church’s theology. Everyone is in need of recovery of some sort, Grace Church insists. In addition to “Celebrate Recovery,” the congregation also offers a variety of small groups to address particular needs. These support groups, offered for concerns as varied as grief, sexual addiction, divorce, and chronic pain, meet weekly at one of the congregation’s three campuses.

Utilizing a recently opened Community Center, Grace Church is also deeply involved with the economic needs of the poor in and around Cape Coral and Fort Myers. Acquired for about $5 million the Community Center is housed in a 56,000 square foot facility that formerly contained a grocery store. The congregation now uses this new space for a large thrift store, which accepts contributions of clothing, furniture, and other miscellaneous items and resells them at affordable prices. The Community Center also contains a food pantry, classrooms for literacy training and preparing students for the GED, a chapel for contemporary worship, as well as more space that the congregation hopes to use for job training or even reduced-fee medical care.

Even with such a vibrant congregation, Grace Church has suffered from the years of recession. Its elaborate vision for social mission is constrained by the realities of its budget. The congregation is even concerned that it will not be able to afford to keep the new Community Center it has recently opened. Grace Church feels called to make “economic recovery” one of the many forms of recovery that it addresses throughout its community. Just as recovery from many forms of addiction and anxiety require long-term dedication to the process of relapse and recovery, Grace Church wants to make a commitment to its community that requires more than addressing immediate needs. It wants to participate in the process of influencing its community’s economic position for years to come.

Symposium
A symposium of people experienced in the realm of economic development, church policy, and business could provide a starting point from which the Cape Coral community can garner ideas and begin to engage in the development of their local community and wider region.
While not centered around churches, the city of Tupelo, Mississippi is an excellent example of community development that started small and met great success. As a result, the “Tupelo Model” is taught as an example of community development at the McLean Institute for Community Development at the University of Mississippi. The city of Tupelo and those who study it have since branched out to develop tools for other struggling communities and can be a great resource of knowledge and experience for Cape Coral.

Churches are very good at providing basic services and meeting immediate needs. Cape Coral has acutely felt the sting of a worldwide recession precipitated by complex global forces. The recession has left Grace Church deeply dissatisfied with ordinary measures of charity and church benevolence. This symposium will be an opportunity for large churches to discuss how they might reach beyond simple charity to devote their resources more imaginatively and strategically to the recovery and prosperity of their communities.

Goals

- **Short Term**
  - Symposium goal date late January
  - Provide project ideas for following CTP class
- **Long Term**
  - Provide mechanisms and mission for Cape Coral to develop community and financial resources in the years to come

Possible Questions to Explore

- How have large churches responded to the financial crisis? Have they dedicated resources only to urgent needs or have they tried to contribute to long-term economic recovery?
- How can the church make positive contributions to long-term recovery?
- How do churches help to create jobs, prevent home foreclosures, or build wealth?
- Is this even appropriate work for churches?
- How ought large churches to allocate their own finite resources, and what non-financial resources might their congregations offer to their communities?
- Does the provision of simple charity for immediate purposes prevail over appropriations to address long-range concerns?
- In the interim period between crisis and recovery, how do large churches offer a compassionate pastoral witness to the tragedies within their communities?
- How do large churches accept their limited agency to propel recovery and how do they cope with the inevitable and frustrating need for patience?
- How do churches control and get out of debt?
- How could the church be involved in regional development?
- What resources does Cape Coral have to aid in development? What are they deficient in?
- What outside resources could be brought in?
- How much human support can the church garner from the surrounding community?
Possible Conference Attendees

- Cal Turner

**Church Affiliates**
- Jorge Acevedo, Lead Pastor, Grace Church
- Wes Olds, Teaching Pastor, Grace Church
- James Hudnut Buemler, Dean, Vanderbilt Divinity School
- L. Gregory Jones, Dean, Duke Divinity School
- Doug Meeks, Cal Turner Chancellor’s Chair in Wesleyan Studies, Vanderbilt Divinity School
- Graham Reside, Director, Cal Turner Program, Vanderbilt Divinity School
- Assortment of Nashville-area churches

**Business Representatives**
- James Bradford, Dean, Owen School of Management, Vanderbilt University
- Bart Victor, Cal Turner Professor of Moral Leadership, Owen School of Management, Vanderbilt University
- James L. Schorr, Clinical Professor of Management, Owen School of Management, Vanderbilt University
- Bill Collins, Professor of Economics, Professor of History (by courtesy), and Director of Graduate Studies, Vanderbilt Economics Representatives of Belmont MBA

**Community Development**
- Paul R. Leonard, Presiding Director, Crosland (real estate), Former Presbyterian pastor, Former CEO, Habitat for Humanity
- Vaughn Grisham, Author of “Hand in Hand: Community and Economic Development in Tupelo,” Director of the McLean Institute for Community Development and Professor of Sociology at The University of Mississippi
- Representative from the Center of Rural Entrepreneurship
- Representative from the Community Development Foundation
- Representative from the CREATE Foundation