Cal Turner Fellowship - Group Project Reflection

For my group project, I worked with Cameron Barr, Bart Victor, and Graham Reside. Late last fall, we became aware of Grace Church in Cape Coral, Florida, through Wes Olds, a friend of Cal Turner. At the time, the Cape Coral area was experiencing one of the highest home foreclosure rates in the US, and the community was in severe economic turmoil. Donations to the church were down, while recipients of their food bank were up. The Lead Pastor, Jorge, and Teaching Pastor, Wes, were feeling a sense of frustration and helplessness. They wanted to reach out and help those in the community, but they weren’t sure how.

We coordinated with Wes and Jorge over a series of several conference calls and arranged a trip in January to experience the church culture and visit the community. Through this trip, we were much better able to see first-hand the extent of the troubles that the community members were facing and how the church operated. As a business school student, I was anxious to put my skill set to work and come up with easy business solutions to all of their problems. I soon realized that the difficulties faced by the members of Grace Church were large and complex. Further, I knew it would be impossible to offer a meaningful and sustainable solution after only a short weekend trip.

Since the trip, our team has met to follow up and share feedback from the trip. We have also started the preliminary plans for a Symposium on Mega Churches and Economic Recovery in the fall of 2010, where we intend to explore the role of churches in economic downturns. We feel this topic is ripe for dialogue. While I cannot say that we have come anywhere close to solving the problems of Cape Coral or many of the other communities like it, I feel like we have taken steps in the right direction. An issue of this magnitude will require a long-term approach and the engagement of key leaders. We hope that this conference can be the starting point of meaningful change.

In working on the project, I really came to appreciate the different views that Cameron, a divinity student, expressed. Often, they were quite different from my opinion, but I definitely understand where he was coming from. I also realized that, while I am a business student, business is not the answer to every problem. Ultimately, in Cape Coral, I feel that economic recovery must come through both a sustainable enterprise approach, led by business, as well as a community approach, where members of the church and town can unite, possibly through the common bond of the church, and pull each other up.