



Beyond the Bubble of Constituent Services:
More with Reggie Blount
July 15, 2026

Mark Ramsey: This is Mark Ramsey of the Ministry Collaborative, along with my colleague Jennifer Watley Maxell, and we've been having this unbelievably good conversation with Reggie Blount, who is at Garrett Evangelical Seminary, and the board chair of the Ministry Collaborative, and many other hats which we're going to explore. We just spent some time talking about youth and young adults, which Reggie has spent a lifetime understanding and amplifying. We want to shift now, Reggie, and talk about a couple of other things that you are very involved in. First, again, for people who maybe didn't listen to the last one (a pox be on their houses), can you just say a little bit about where you are and what roles you fill?

Reggie Blount: Sure. Again, thanks for having me, and this has been great conversation. I am a faculty member at Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary, teaching in the area of Christian education, youth and young adult ministry, and congregational leadership. I'm also the co-founder and executive director of a young nonprofit called the Oikos Institute for Social Impact that works with congregations who serve in under-resourced communities to harness the power of their assets, to be able to make greater social impact where they serve.

Jennifer Watley Maxell: So, in your work at Oikos, help us understand: when you talk about helping organizations leverage their assets for social impact, what does that mean? What kind of assets are we talking about, and what are the types of social impact that you've seen congregations be able to make?

Reggie: Thanks for that question. So much of our work is rooted in the book that my co-founder, Dr. Sidney Williams, wrote, called *Fishing Differently*. And this model that we work out of suggests that congregations, even for those who are serving in under-resourced communities, have more assets available to them than what they see in their offering plate. And so, we use this model called FISH. And FISH stands for Financial capital, Intellectual capital, Social capital, and Human capital.

Financial capital is, yes, all the financial resources that we receive through the offering plate, and maybe even some small grants or things of that nature. But one of the pieces that often gets missed in financial capital is real estate, your building. What kind of imaginative ways can you think about the utilization of your building that helps you accomplish the kind of impact that you want to have in the community?

Intellectual capital is recognizing that you have gifts and talents sitting right there in your pews that often go unnoticed and non-leveraged. So, the question becomes, do you know the gifts? Do you know the talents? Do you know the spheres of influence of the people sitting right there in your pew? Do you know their story? I've come across too many who only know their members by the pew they sit in, or by the church ministry that they're involved (if they're an usher, if they're a choir member), but they have no idea of their full story and no idea what they do Monday through Saturday, and not recognizing that

those gifts and talents and that sphere of influence have possibilities of being missionally leveraged to, again, achieve the kind of vision and possibilities that the congregation would desire to engage in.

And then the S is social capital. Too many of our congregations do their work in silo, and our call and our work is helping congregations to think about the fact that they have missionally-aligned partners right outside their doors, if they were able to take the time to identify them and begin the work of building relationship, so that, together, they can be able to bring their resources to bear to have a greater impact. And what we're talking about as far as social impact is: how are we addressing social determinants of health, challenges that are happening right there in our community? Is there issues related to food insecurity? Is there issues related to the need for tutoring or preschool kind of work? Is there communal health challenges that need to be addressed? Wherever the congregation feels that God is leading them to address, and as they are also identifying community partners together, those are the great opportunities for social impact, community transformation, to take place.

Mark: Reggie, if a pastor or a board member is listening to this right now, how can they connect with Oikos and see if they might fit into what you're trying to do?

Reggie: So, the way that Oikos does its work currently is through a cohort model. And the cohort is made up of 12 to 15 congregations. Each congregation is asked to put together a team of a pastor and three lay leaders. And together, we go through nine months of module training. We have nine different modules that we take our congregations through, and then we spend another nine months to a year focused around a project that they would engage in. We tend to not create a cohort unless we have the funding to support the cohort. And we do it within a geographical area. Right now, we're working in eight cities.

So, that said, it's all according to whether the funding comes together – because we don't charge the congregations to participate – whether the funding has come together, whether or not it's advantageous for the community that we are looking to enter into. That said, we are definitely open to sharing our FISH model in a workshop setting and doing some consulting, if necessary, with various congregations.

Mark: You also said you've been doing a lot of work in congregational leadership, which is, obviously, closely aligned with this. That's a large topic. What are your thoughts, right now, about congregational leadership?

Reggie: I'm being influenced more and more by what we are seeing with the work that we are doing through the Oikos Institute. So, the first I will say is: do congregations have a real theological grounding for the work that they do? One of the things that I have been sharing with the congregations that we are working with is to begin thinking about social impact as acts of discipleship. And, just let me tell you a real quick story as to how I enter into that with the congregations. I've done workshops in the past on discipleship. And the question that I ask the participants is to think about the question that Jesus asked his disciples as they were walking through Caesarea Philippi when he asked, "Who do the people say that I am?" and "Who do you say that I am?"

And they know Peter's answer. And so, when I say, "If Jesus was standing here in front of you, how would you answer the same question?"

They give the same answer of Peter: "Son of the living God, Messiah."

And then I say, "Great. I affirm your answer. Allow me to give you a follow-up. And the follow-up question is, out of all that you have just named, what can you emulate?" And it's usually a bit of a hush. And what I say to them is that, "If the only answers that we can say about who Jesus is speaks to his divinity, then we opt out of discipleship, because we can't emulate discipleship." So then the next thing I say to them is, "If our faith teaches us that Jesus both fully divine and fully human, the real question is, what did Jesus model for us, while Jesus walked amongst us, and then told us to go and do likewise? Or, as it's written in John, 'You will do the same thing that I have done, even greater things.'"

And so, when we talk about issues of addressing food insecurity, that should not be seen as outreach work or charitable work. That ought to be seen as discipleship work. When we are addressing issues related to communal health, just as we helped out with vaccinations during COVID and all of that, that should not be seen as outreach work or charitable work. That should be seen as discipleship work. "When I was hungry, you fed me. When I was sick, you cared for me. Whatever you've done for the least of these, you've done unto me." So, these are discipleship items versus just looking at it as an appendage of the work of the church.

Jennifer: So, what I really love about you identifying the importance of knowing your community is it forces us out of our buildings. What are some of the ways that you've seen, at Oikos, that people have been able to find partners, particularly for areas that may be of real need in the community? Like, every community has gaps, and every community has lapses that churches may be able to step in and help to bridge that gap.

Reggie: I think this is a great opportunity to tap into the intellectual capital of your congregation. What does it mean to ask members of your congregation, "Who should we know in this community?" Unless the whole congregation are folk who are driving in and nobody's connected to the community – which I hope is rare – it's being able to ask the members of your congregation, "Who should we know?" And, in particular, "Who do you think we need to build relationship with to allow us to be able to expand and be able to make greater impact on this vision that we feel that God has given us, has entrusted to us?"

Now, I said something that has a presumption, and the presumption is that the church has a vision, that the church has a commitment, a vision to something. And so, if the church does have a clear vision as to how they want to make a difference in the lives of people outside of their doors, it's a natural thing to me to be able to then ask those members of your congregation, who have stories and lives outside of your congregation, "Who should we be talking to? Who can you introduce us to? Who are the best folk to be able to build relationship with, that would align with this vision and mission that we have, that can be able to help us expand our work?"

Mark: Yeah. And it seems to me, in the work we do with congregations, the minute you can get beyond the bubble of constituent services – "we are here to serve those we know and who are giving the

money” – the minute that bubble gets burst, the God-given sky is the limit on what you can do for communities, for connections, for partnerships, but you gotta get out of that bubble.

And there’s a cost for that. Let’s face it. In every congregation I’ve served, there’s a cost. There’s the people who say, “Why are we looking at others when we’ve got needs here?” Well, we need to get beyond that.

Reggie: I pastored for 27 years. I know the difficulty of this “either/or” dynamic. But the reality is, if we’re committed to what we believe that God is asking us to be engaged in, then we can find ways to do both. We can meet the spiritual needs of our constituency who are inside the doors, as we are being good stewards of the community that’s outside of our doors. I’m back to Jeremiah 29:7: “Seek the peace and the welfare.” And the Hebrew word for “the peace and prosperity” in that verse is “shalom”. “Seek the shalom of the city. And as they prosper, you prosper.”

Everybody benefits when the congregation is exercising and living out the vision and work that God has entrusted to them, and really look to meeting the needs of the community, not as a quid pro quo – “we’re going to help so that you join our church” – but they fully see it as, “This is the work that God has called us to and this is our stewardship that has been entrusted to us.”

Jennifer: What I love about what you’re suggesting, Reggie, is that there really is room for congregations of all sizes to do this work of impact in their community, because it is so incredibly grounded in where the congregation is. I think sometimes congregations, particularly, I think, more affluent congregations, or congregations that do not see themselves as part of the community, feel they have to go out and find some people; as if, whatever the demographic is, there are not issues, which means more opportunity, because it means you really can deal with the issues in your literal community.

I remember when I was in seminary, doing some work with an affluent church here in Atlanta, and we were talking about social impact, and getting to know the community, the issues. And people were saying, “Well, we have money. We don’t have issues. We have money.”

And I’m like, “Yeah, you have money, but you also have a really big issue with depression and suicide in your youth ministry.” However, I think they could not see that need. It was almost like it was too close, and it wasn’t what they had in their mind as those people or the needs. Are there tools that are available for congregations to be able to do that internal assessment that is about them, who they are, and their immediate community, to really figure out what are the most pressing needs for them to address?

Reggie: So, I’m going to run the risk of meddling. And part of the challenge, I think...so I’m not going to just put it on affluent churches. I think many of us have this challenge, that we confuse a theology of ownership with a theology of stewardship. When we believe that we own something, then we make different kinds of decisions based on an ownership mentality. If we truly believe that God calls us to stewardship, that nothing that we have we own, that when we die, there will be no Brink truck following behind us, all that we have is what has been entrusted to us. And so, if affluent churches understood

that all that they have has been entrusted to them, then the question is, “What are we called to do with what has been entrusted to us by the one who gave it to us in the first place?”

Mark: That is so crucial to ministry today. What you just said, so crucial. Just a little grace note at the end: you said you spent almost three decades as a parish pastor. You are contributing to ministry in so many ways. What do you miss about being a parish pastor?

Reggie: I miss the people. I fondly say...because I’m a Methodist, and so I pastored four different congregations. The last congregation that I pastored, I always said to them, and I continue to say now, they were the best church this side of heaven. So, I miss being with them. But I stepped away because of the growth that was taking place with the Oikos Institute, and they deserved more than what I could give them. And so that’s why I released that. So, yeah, I miss the people.

Mark: That sounds like a good stewardship choice on your own behalf. Reggie, can’t thank you enough. And I know, along with Jennifer, we want to express our appreciation for your leadership of our board, and what that has meant to us through a lot of growth and deepening of what we’re doing. Your steady, wise, guiding hand, and stewardship of us, has meant the world, and continues to. So, thank you...as well as this very, very rich conversation. Thank you so much, my friend.

Reggie: Well, thank you both. And it’s been great to have this conversation with you. It’s great to be a part of the Ministry Collaborative, and looking forward to what our future holds.