

## Option for the Poor and the Journey to Regional Solidarity

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### I. Introduction

This paper updates the progress in a program of inquiry and action on the question of solidarity with the poor in our metropolitan regions. This program has involved over twenty years of working with colleagues and students at the University of Dayton in community based learning in the urban neighborhoods of Dayton, Ohio. This work is focused on community organizing to break the cycle of poverty and neighborhood revitalization as well as the effectiveness of the Catholic presence in distressed neighborhoods. The principles and images of the Catholic social tradition as well as the best social science practices of breaking the cycle of poverty have guided the program. These experiences have contributed to a learning process where we gain a better appreciation of what works for creating greater regional solidarity in overcoming the social sins of poverty and racism.

Throughout these efforts, I have been reflecting on the question, “How can the Catholic Church effectively exercise *an option for the poor* in the metropolitan regions of the United States?”<sup>1</sup> The *See, Judge, and Act* framework of Catholic Social Practice<sup>2</sup> provides an organizing framework for these reflections. The first major section addresses the question, “What is the situation of the poor in the metropolitan regions of the United States?” In this section two images -- the Fragmented City and the Silent Violence of Poverty helps us understand the social sins of poverty and racism. The image of the Fragmented City helps us understand the architecture of economic and racial segregation that is characteristic of most of the metropolitan regions of the United States. Within this regional architecture, there are a number of high poverty or distressed neighborhoods, often disconnected from affluent neighborhoods. In these distressed neighborhoods, children and families often suffer significant violence caused by structural and cultural forces. These distressed neighborhoods have a disproportionate number of children and families of color. We capture this reality by the image – “silent violence of poverty.”

Added to this growing economic and racial segregation, there is the growth of individualism in US culture and political polarization within the region. These factors have made it difficult for the governing bodies of the metropolitan regions to collaborate in addressing the structural injustices of poverty and racism. In response to the growth of a fractured regional architecture, the Catholic Church, especially in the East and the Midwest, has lost its capacity to be present in distressed neighborhoods, especially neighborhoods with people of color. This first section concludes with a question, “How have Catholics and the Catholic Church been complicit in the sinful structures of poverty and racism?”

The second major section of the paper focuses on the question, “Why should the Church exercise the option for the poor?” Through his writings and speeches, Pope Francis has offered a challenging vision for a Church that wishes to exercise an option for the poor. Key elements of this Francis’ teaching

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<sup>1</sup> This paper updates work done on The Church and Regional Solidarity at the University of Dayton conducted by the Fr. Ferree Professor of Social Justice and colleagues in the Fitz Center for Leadership in Community, the College of Arts and Sciences, and social justice advocates in the community. Earlier work on The Church and Regional Solidarity Program is contained in “Post Parochial Strategies for Advancing Urban Solidarity”. [https://udayton.edu/artssciences/endowedchair/ferree/resources/images\\_files/post-parochial-studies.pdf](https://udayton.edu/artssciences/endowedchair/ferree/resources/images_files/post-parochial-studies.pdf) and “The Fractured City, Integral Development, and the Regional Church. [https://udayton.edu/artssciences/endowedchair/ferree/resources/images\\_files/post-parochial-studies.pdf](https://udayton.edu/artssciences/endowedchair/ferree/resources/images_files/post-parochial-studies.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A for a set of guiding questions that we have been using for Catholic social practice.

provide a vision for the journey of regional solidarity. We identify six elements of that vision. Next, we turn to describe how the Church can exercise the option for the poor is through regional solidarity, i.e. the application of personal and social virtue of solidarity to address the injustice of poverty and racism. Regional solidarity provides guidance on how we should focus on option by the poor and with the poor.

The third and final section addresses the question, “What are strategies for undertaking the journey to regional solidarity?” The journey to regional solidarity is a sequence of conversations. The concept of critical conversations is introduced along with the virtues or habits necessary to participate in these conversations. Two different types of constructive conversations have been particularly effective in the journey for regional solidarity -- conversations of friendship and conversations for action. Brief illustrations of how these conversations can be used on the journey to region solidarity is provided. The paper concludes by outlining six strategies for the journey to regional solidarity.

## **Part I: *See* -- What is the Situation of Poverty and Race in Our Metropolitan Regions?**

In this *See* phase of Catholic social practice one endeavors to listen to people affected by injustice and together frame the issues to be addressed. This social analysis focuses on metropolitan regions for three reasons. First, metropolitan regions have become the locus of urban life in North America as well as major drivers of the American economy. Second, collaboration across the metropolitan region is required to address the injustice of poverty and racism. Third, the regional focus allows us to articulate a new way of being Church – a metropolitan Church that advances regional solidarity.

### **The Metropolitan Region: The Fractured City and the Silent Violence of Poverty**

If we are city dwellers, our place of residence is in an individual neighborhood. Yet, if we examine the patterns of our daily interactions, it becomes clear that our city living involves not only our neighborhoods, but also much of the metropolitan region. We go to the center city for entertainment and perhaps for good restaurants, and to the suburbs to visit friends, shop, or work. In our contemporary life, the metropolitan region has become the context of city living.

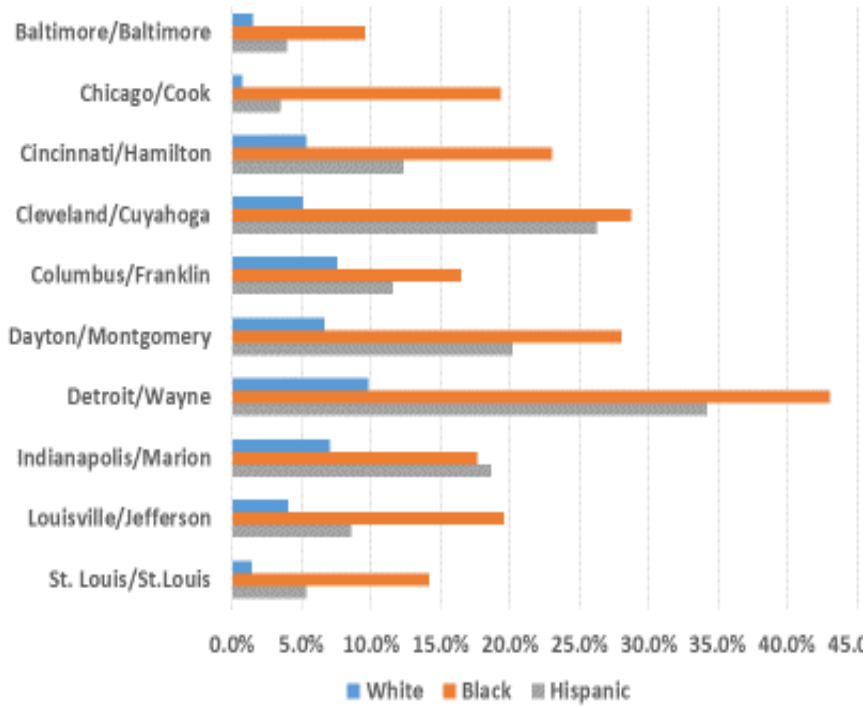
An analysis of trends over the past fifty years illustrates that major metropolitan regions in North America have evolved into an architecture that is highly segregated by economic class and race.<sup>3</sup> High-poverty neighborhoods — those with greater than a 40% poverty rate — are usually in the center of metropolitan regions with a high concentration of people of color. More highly affluent, mainly white neighborhoods are in the extended suburbs. Figure 1 (Top of Next Page) illustrates the segregation of the Black (African American) and Hispanic populations in high-poverty neighborhoods of several metropolitan counties. The metropolitan region as the situation of our urban living has become a “Fractured City.” We will use the image of the Fractured City to identify dimensions of a major injustice that I will call “the silent violence of poverty.”

### **The Opportunity Gap in the Fractured City**

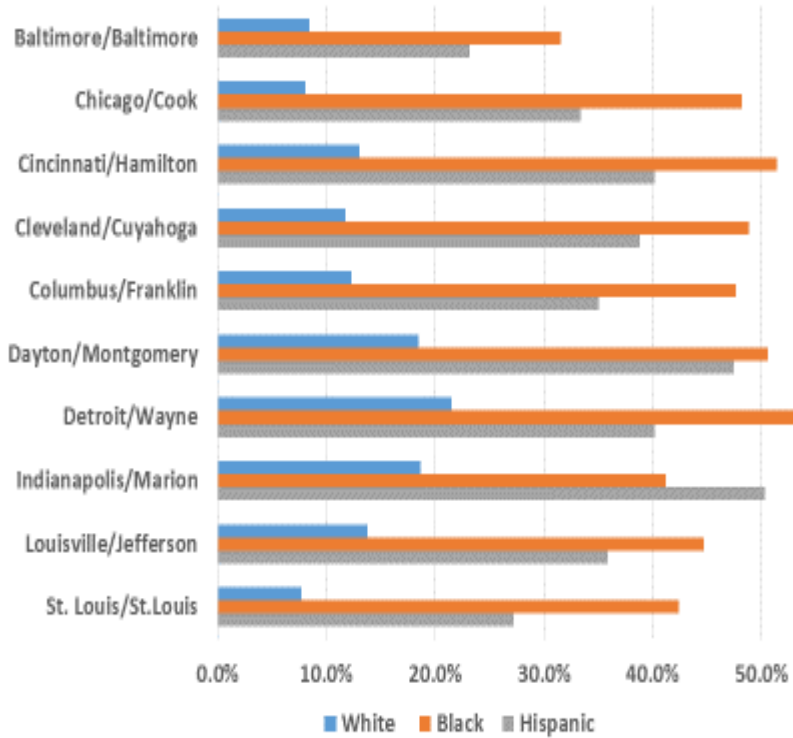
A number of studies have examined the impact of the Fractured City on opportunities for children and defined “the opportunity gap.” This is the gap between the opportunities available to children in high-poverty neighborhoods and the opportunities available to children in highly affluent neighborhoods. Children in affluent neighborhoods have fewer obstacles and often have supportive networks to assist them with any roadblocks they encounter. Figure 2 (Bottom of Next Page) illustrates the percentage of children living below the poverty line in major metropolitan regions of the East and Midwest of the United States. Again, children of color experience a disproportionate influence of poverty. This section examines the injustice of this regional architecture.

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<sup>3</sup> Paul A. Jagowsky, *The Architecture of Segregation: Civil Unrest, the Concentration of Poverty, and Public Policy* (New York: The Century Foundation, 2015). <https://tcf.org/content/report/architecture-of-segregation/> (accessed February 22, 2018).



**Figure 1: Percentage of the Population Living Areas of Concentrated Poverty (>40%) in 2015**



**Figure 2: Percentage of Children Living Below the Poverty Level 2015**

**The Neighborhood Experience:** Neighborhoods provide an ecology for families and can enhance or detract from the opportunities for children. The ecology of high-poverty neighborhoods presents numerous roadblocks to children’s development. If we examine the demographics of high-poverty neighborhoods, we see a high percentage of single-parent families, many of whom lack a post-secondary credential. Parents often do not earn sufficient wages to support their families and must rely on different programs in the welfare system to provide for their children. These neighborhoods experience higher rates of crime, especially violent crimes. In high-poverty neighborhoods, fewer adult role models who demonstrate the habits and character traits required for employment and supporting a family. These neighborhoods often lack supportive networks of neighbors and friends, who help families and look out for children. Amenities, such as playgrounds and recreational activities, are lacking. With a high number of renters and abandoned properties, there is often a lack of pride in the upkeep of the neighborhood. Most often, these neighborhoods are “food deserts” without access to high-quality foods, such as fruits and vegetables. The physical environment of high-poverty neighborhoods is unhealthy with poor air quality (and a high percentage of asthma) and the presence of toxic substances such as lead paint. Often families in high-poverty neighborhoods experience isolation, without the bonds of trust and a sense of collective agency needed to work with others to improve the quality of life in the neighborhood.

The demographics of affluent neighborhoods are strikingly different. There is a higher percentage of two-parent families, and many of the parents are college graduates. One or both parents have family-supportive wages. Within families and the neighborhood, there is a high expectation that children will go to college. There are lower rates of crime, especially violent crime. There are adult role models in the extended families and mentors, teachers, and coaches. These neighborhoods offer good options for healthy food and plenty of recreational amenities, such as playgrounds and athletic leagues. The living environment is healthy, with high air quality and the absence of toxic substances.

**Learning in the Neighborhoods:** Multiple research studies have demonstrated that the quality of a child’s early learning environments — in the family, in childcare, and in pre-school — have a major impact on the early brain development.<sup>4</sup> High-quality childcare and early learning opportunities are mostly absent from high-poverty neighborhoods. When parents work multiple jobs just to keep food on the table and a roof overhead, they do not have the resources for quality early learning and must rely on relatives or friends to provide childcare. There are fewer opportunities for enrichment in schools in high-poverty neighborhoods. For a multitude of reasons, parents in high-poverty neighborhoods are disengaged and/or discouraged from participating in their children’s school. Because of declining property values and high tax-delinquency rates, urban school systems have less money to invest in improving the quality of education. The systems, administrators, and the teachers are often not equipped to handle many of the roadblocks to learning that their children face.

In affluent neighborhoods, high-quality childcare and early learning opportunities are readily accessible, and families can afford these opportunities. School districts in affluent neighborhoods have the finances needed to provide high-quality early learning opportunities. The culture of schools in affluent neighborhoods reinforces college participation, and persistence rates (the percentage of students who return to college for a second year) are among the highest in the region.

**Parenting in the Neighborhoods:** Parents are the first teachers of their children, and parents in high-poverty neighborhoods face severe disadvantages in carrying out this task. Parenting in a high-poverty neighborhood, especially if you are single, is highly stressful because you focus on making sure your family has food and shelter while coping with a difficult work schedule. A parent in a high-poverty neighborhood experiences many roadblocks in accessing welfare benefits. As their income increases, parents often experience the “cliff effect” — a decrease or loss of a benefit such as childcare, which lessens the family’s overall financial resources. Parents often cannot afford health insurance for

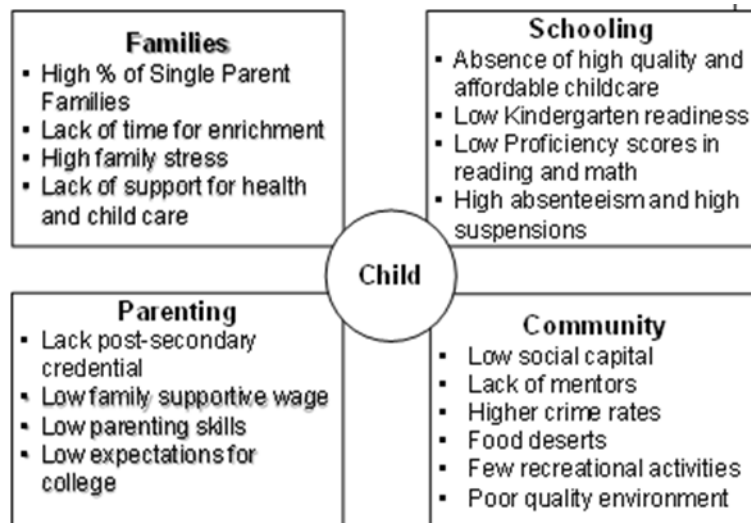
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<sup>4</sup> For a good summary, see Poverty in Early Childhood, <https://www.cssp.org/policy/2016/Poverty-in-Early-Childhood-Fact-Sheet.pdf> (Accessed on June 6, 2018).

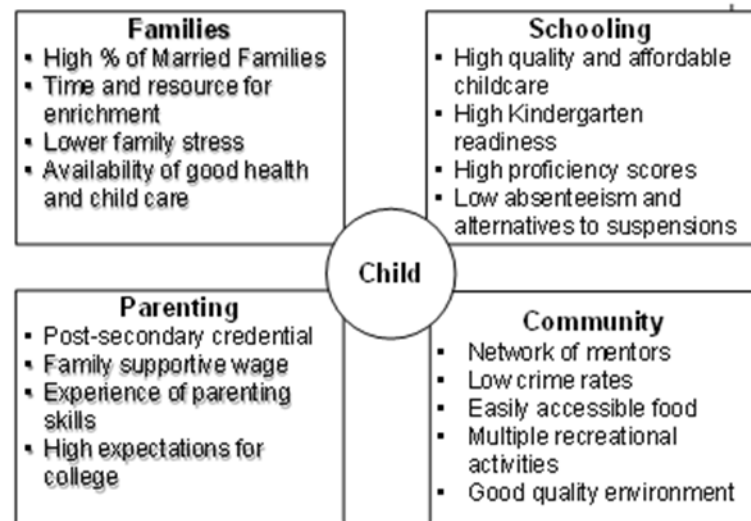
themselves or their children. A major illness often means a major financial setback. Managing this stress gives parents little time to engage in activities that could enhance their children’s intellectual and social-emotional development. Managing the dynamics of a family in poverty puts a great deal of stress on parents in high-poverty neighborhoods and makes it difficult to handle the many roadblocks in caring for their children. This can lead to a sense of hopelessness, depression, and sometimes, substance abuse.

Families in affluent neighborhoods have more resources for nurturing and educating their children. With the predominance of two-parent families, with one or both having a post-secondary degree, there is a strong expectation that their children will go to college. At least one of the parents has employment with a family-supportive wage and health care benefits, enabling them to provide high-quality childcare and early learning. Many of the parents grew up in traditional family households, where supportive and developmental approaches to parenting have been modeled. Often a supportive network of family and friends can provide advice on parenting skills. While family life in affluent neighborhoods presents occasional stressful situations, the parents have the resilience to cope. Parents have more leisure time and can read to their children, assist them in their schoolwork, and provide enrichment activities like music education, travel and athletics.

**Childhood in the Neighborhoods:** Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the social ecology of the two neighborhoods, one high-poverty and the other affluent. All the above factors contribute to a lack of academic success for children in high-poverty neighborhoods. The stress of poverty negatively affects the early development of those parts of the brain (executive function), affecting early academic and emotional learning. High-poverty neighborhoods have a higher percent of children who are not kindergarten ready, have higher levels of chronic absenteeism, greater drop-out rates, and a lower percentage who are proficient in third-grade reading and fourth-grade mathematics. Young children in high-poverty neighborhoods have heard markedly fewer words than children from affluent neighborhoods. Children raised in single-parent families, as compared to intact families, are more likely to have emotional and behavioral problems; be physically abused, smoke, drink, and use drugs; be aggressive; engage in violent, delinquent, and criminal behavior; and have



**Figure 3: The Ecology of a High Poverty Neighborhood**



**Figure 4: The Ecology of an Affluent Neighborhood**

developmental delays. Only a few highly resilient students from high-poverty neighborhoods will persist in school to obtain a college degree or a post-secondary credential.

### **The Opportunity Gap as the Silent Violence of Poverty**

Clearly, children in high-poverty neighborhoods face multiple interrelated and complex factors that place roadblocks in their journey to realize the “American Dream.” Qualitative and quantitative research methods have helped identify these factors. When you listen to children and families in high-poverty neighborhoods, you hear narratives of suffering and isolation. Listen to the story of a mother who eats very little, just so she can provide food for her children: this is a story of both generosity and suffering. Consider the story that I heard in a tutoring session where a second grader explained that he could not complete his homework because he hid in fear while his mother’s boyfriend was abusing her. A colleague tells the story about asking third graders what they want to be when they grow up and hearing one young man say his only future was going to jail. When asked why, he replied, “All the men in my family are in jail or have gone to jail.” While working on a community Task Force on Child Protection, a social worker and I visited a woman whose child had been taken into custody by Children’s Services. She had neglected the child because of her alcohol addiction but told us that she deeply wanted to change so she could be reunited her child. When the social worker called the county’s Addiction Services, she was told that this mother could not get services for nine weeks. You could see the pain and suffering in the tears of this mother. These stories of pain, suffering, and alienation tell me that a better name for the opportunity gap is the “silent violence of poverty.” It is “silent” because most people in the metropolitan region are indifferent to it, and it is “violence” because it does long-term physical and psychological harm to children, families, and to the structures of neighborhoods. Maps, graphs, and tables can demonstrate the immensity of the injustice of urban poverty and the opportunity gap; but I believe only narratives like these can help us appreciate the “silent violence of poverty.” Sharing experiences and stories like these provide a strong motivation for working for economic and racial justice in our metropolitan regions.

### **The Fractured City and Public Discourse**

**Excesses of American Individualism and its Consequences:**<sup>5</sup> The Declaration of Independence asserted, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain Unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” With these words, the American experiment incorporated a biblically based tradition of a Creator, and republican tradition of citizen rule with the Enlightenment tradition of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Throughout many years of the Republic, these traditions existed in creative tension, providing a force for both unity and progress. The biblical and the republican traditions focus on the common good; and the Enlightenment tradition focuses on a strong individualism.

The individualistic strand of American culture insisted that a person had the freedom to define his or her own identity, as opposed to an outside entity, such as the government or church, defining that identity for them. Individuals had the freedom to pursue their interests using their own talents, abilities, and ambitions. In many respects, this strand of individualism enabled generations to settle the vast expanses of the American frontier. Individualism was responsible for making the United States, in later eras, a leader in innovation on many fronts.

As the biblical and republic traditions faded in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, so did the focus on the common good. Individualism became the predominate strand of American culture, and excessive individualism has shaped contemporary American life. Financial success, security, and status in society became the drivers that provide purpose for one’s life. The shared concern for the common good of neighborhood and city began to fade.

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<sup>5</sup> See especially the “Introduction to the Updated Edition” of Bellah, Robert N., et al. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. University of California Press, 1996.

Excessive individualism was a major cultural cause of the regional trends of economic and racial segregation. Families experiencing the financial security of the post-World War II period were free to choose where they would like to live. Spurred by government policies that provided low-cost loans and expanded highways, for example, families could choose larger houses with bigger yards in safer and more secure neighborhoods, populated by people very much like themselves.

**Polarization in the Region:** As we have seen, the evolution of the social architecture of the metropolitan region has reinforced patterns of isolation and disconnection between neighborhoods of concentrated poverty and affluent neighborhoods. Each of these neighborhoods has developed its own culture, i.e., shared convictions, beliefs, attitudes, and practices. In each of these neighborhoods, residents encounter people just like themselves — people who often use the same media for information and share the same political convictions. In addition, the neighborhoods of the region have become isolated from one another and have few opportunities to share common experiences and stories. Through a variety of media, the poor know about the lives of the more affluent, and the more affluent know about the lives of the poor, often through the reports of failing schools or TV coverage of violence in poor neighborhoods. These stereotypes of each neighborhood keep them isolated from one another. Persons in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty and persons in more affluent neighborhoods have become “strangers” to one another.

As Bill Bishop indicated in 2008:

As people seek out the social settings they prefer—as they choose the group that makes them feel the most comfortable—the nation grows more politically segregated—and the benefit that ought to come with having a variety of opinions is lost to the righteousness that is the special entitlement of homogeneous groups. We all live with the results: balkanized communities whose inhabitants find other Americans to be culturally incomprehensible; a growing intolerance for political differences that has made national consensus impossible; and politics so polarized that Congress is stymied, and elections are no longer just contests over policies, but bitter choices between ways of life.<sup>6</sup>

**Breakdown of Public Dialogue:** This sorting of neighborhoods has led to polarization in regional governance and public conversations. In this climate of polarization, neighborhoods and political jurisdictions focus on self-interest and not the mutual interests of the whole region, contributing to the fractured nature of the region. Overcoming the silent violence of poverty and advancing justice requires a public space for conversations that can address complex problems and social evils and develop a shared vision for the future, characterized by equitable opportunities for human flourishing by all people and groups within the region. While some metropolitan regions have made progress, isolation and the protection of self-interest have made it difficult to create the necessary public spaces for conversations to promote the region’s common good. As David Brooks notes, “The greatest challenge of our moment is the crisis of isolation and fragmentation, the need to rebuild the fabric of society that has been torn by selfishness, cynicism, distrust and autonomy.”<sup>7</sup>

### **The Catholic Church in the Fractured City**

Growing economic and racial segregation also has consequences for the Church’s capacity to address the silent violence of poverty in the metropolitan region. The movement of Catholics to the suburbs combined with an outmoded parochial financial strategy has caused the Catholic Church to diminish its presence in the urban core, especially in high-poverty neighborhoods.

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<sup>6</sup> Bill Bishop. *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded American is Tearing Us Apart*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, New York, New York. 2008.

<sup>7</sup> David Brooks, “The Death of Idealism.” *New York Times*, September 30, 2016, A27, accessed May 1, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/30/opinion/the-death-of-idealism.html>.

**Movement to the Suburbs:** Catholics, because of their strong family structure and excellent education, most often in Catholic schools, are among the most economically upwardly mobile religious groups. In examining the available data, it also seems that Catholics are moving to the suburbs as fast as or faster than the general population of the metropolitan region. This movement has resulted in the growth of suburban parishes and parish schools. With this growth of prosperity, resources that were once used to maintain a Catholic presence in the urban core have also moved to the suburbs.

**Inadequacy of a Parochial Financial Strategy:** The Catholic Church faces a major obstacle to address the silent violence of poverty: an outdated and inadequate parochial financial strategy. This financial strategy, which worked well during the early and middle 20<sup>th</sup> century, places the major responsibility for creating and sustaining a Catholic educational presence on the parents of the children and resources of the local parish. This strategy assumes “If the parish can no longer support the school, based on tuition and parish resources, it is to be closed.” If there is to be a Catholic educational presence, then there must be local resources. For the most part, responsibility for Catholic presence in high-poverty neighborhoods is at the local level. The creation of special inner-city Catholic education funds has been able to prop-up this financial strategy on a temporary basis.

In almost every metropolitan region, this movement to the suburbs, the availability of fewer clergy and a parochial financial strategy are factors that have led to a significant diminishment of the Catholic presence in the urban core, especially high-poverty neighborhoods. There have been widespread closings or consolidations of urban parishes and closings of many urban Catholic schools. Initial research indicates that once a Catholic school is no longer present, a neighborhood experiences deterioration of social capital along with the elevated levels of crime and disorder and suppressed levels of social cohesion.<sup>8</sup>

**Polarization within the Church<sup>9</sup>:** The Catholic Church in our metropolitan regions is experiencing the same polarization and breakdown in public discourse as that of our civil community. While this breakdown in conversation is often about the application of Church doctrine to specific situations, it also enters conversations about how we might become a “poor Church for the poor.” These conversations not only rely on an appreciation of the Catholic social tradition, but also incorporate perspectives on social change and politics. Because Catholics are dispersed throughout the metropolitan region, their perspectives are diverse and are often shaped by the social and political perspective of their particular neighborhood. We have a greatly diminished capacity to hold constructive conversations that bridge across the parishes of the regional Church.

**Erosion of a Public Voice:** In some periods of our history as a North American Catholic Church, our collective voice made important contributions to public discourse. While several bishops have made statements on racism and immigration, the voice of the Catholic Church has been noticeably absent in shaping public discourse within the region, especially in addressing the issues affecting the silent violence of poverty. Today, the Church often lacks the capacity to hold conversations across the parish boundaries that bring the voice of the Church into public discourse. While a number of Churches have entered into ecumenical and faith-based organizing efforts within metropolitan regions, the Catholic Church has not been a major voice in public conversations.

**A Dilemma for the Church:** As economic and racial segregation have grown, so have the center-city neighborhoods locked in the cycle of poverty. As Catholics have moved to the suburbs and the Catholic Church, consequently, invested its resources to build churches and schools in the suburbs, it has disinvested in the urban neighborhoods. What are the consequences for the Church and her mission to advance justice? Are the members of the Catholic Church willing to address the injustice of high-poverty

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<sup>8</sup> Margaret Brinig & Nicole Garnett, *Lost Classroom, Lost Community: Catholic Schools' Importance in Urban America*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> See the essays in Konieczny, Mary Ellen, et al eds. *Polarization in the US Catholic Church: Naming the Wound, Beginning to Heal*, Collegeville, Minnesota, Liturgical Press, 2016.



neighborhoods? Many Catholics in the suburbs have little or no contact or interaction with people in high-poverty neighborhoods nor practical knowledge of the realities of living in poverty. There is a “gap” between the experience of Catholics in the more affluent and middle-class suburbs and the experience of Catholics and others living in high-poverty neighborhoods.

### **Structural Sin in the Metropolitan Region**

On April 12, 2015, when the Baltimore police approached Freddie Gray, a 25-year-old black man, he ran. As seen by a video that as police captured him and pinned him to the ground he was screaming and asking for help. While being transported in a police van, Gray fell into a coma. The police then transported him to a trauma center. After medical treatment Freddie Gray died. On the day of his funeral, riots broke out in Baltimore. In his homily, responding to the events around these riots, Archbishop William E. Lori said:

“What we do know is that Freddie Gray’s death has brought to the surface longstanding issues of what we call in Catholic moral theology ‘structural sin’ – structural sin, or social sin, goes beyond individual wrongdoing. It is the sum of people’s injustice and indifference that end up creating a society where it is difficult, almost impossible, for human beings to flourish, to lead lives that are happy, productive, and secure.”

Structural sin manifests itself in policies, laws, and social practices that fail to respect or enhance the dignity of certain groups in society. Structural sin is the result or accumulation of personal sins, such as greed and racial bias, etc. A number of examples illustrate the negative impact of structural sin on the lives of the poor and people of color.

Redlining — the practice of lenders denying mortgages to qualified borrowers, usually people of color, in certain neighborhoods — is an example of structural sin. Loan officers may have a bias against people of color and use the applicant's color and the property's location as the only indications that the person seeking the loan may not be a good credit risk. Redlining started in many communities in the 1930’s and, over the years, has had the impact of decreasing home ownership in neighborhoods, leading to a growing number of rentals and eventually to decreased housing values. Deteriorating housing stock in redlined neighborhoods motivated those with economic resources to move to more affluent neighborhoods.

The practice of blockbusting is a second example of a structural sin that has influenced the architecture of our metropolitan regions. In blockbusting, real estate agents would sell a house in a predominately white neighborhood to a minority buyer (usually an African American or a Jew). In turn, the agents would then tell the remaining neighbors that a minority group was moving into the neighborhood and, if they did not sell quickly, their house would lose value and they would lose their investment. The real estate agent benefited from this churn of housing sales.

Exclusionary zoning is a third example of a structural sin. Some suburbs, in order to control who could move there, would set up zoning regulations that required large lot sizes or other conditions to ensure that only more affluent families, usually white, could build houses in the neighborhood.

These three examples demonstrate the ways that personal sins, such as greed, stereotyping, and racial prejudices, coalesce into social structures and cultures that discriminate against people of color and those trapped in poverty. In North America, the people of color are largely African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans. In our analysis, it is clear that poverty affects people of color in a more dramatic way than whites. Personal bias is a set of implicit biases contained in beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors that people of color and people in poverty have inferior human traits, capabilities, and moral character compared to the white population. Family upbringing and one’s social environment are major forces in shaping this set of biases against people of color and those trapped in poverty. For the majority of us who are white, this bias is tacit and unconscious.

Over time, these personal biases influence the way we create structures and cultures in our organizations, institutions, and even our Churches. These structures and cultures have set up conditions that disadvantage people of color and people trapped in poverty and provide advantages and opportunities for white persons and persons whose wealth gives them relative comfort. The architecture of our metropolitan regions has created “white privilege” and “wealth privilege.” For most of us who are white and relatively comfortable economically, these privileges are invisible to us. They have been a tacit part of our life. As we explore the response of the Church to the “Fractured City” and the “silent violence of poverty,” we must address the reality that many Catholics benefit from “white privilege” and the “wealth privilege.”

Addressing the structural sins of our metropolitan regions is difficult work. Unlike personal sin, structural sin is institutional and social, and reconciliation must come through institutional and social transformation. Earlier I identified the “silent violence of poverty” as the structural sin that affects the well-being of children and families of our high-poverty neighborhoods. The institutional nature of structural sin is difficult to observe; we are not good at analyzing the impact of institutions. We participate in structural sin when we, through our actions or omissions, support or exploit the evil of structural sin. We can often take refuge in the impossibility or complexity of changing socially sinful conditions and not act at all. To address structural sin, we first need personal conversion to the virtue of solidarity and we need to organize groups and associations that can bring about the necessary social transformation to overturn structural sin.

### **Argument So Far and a Question**

I can summarize the arguments so far with five assertions:

- Metropolitan regions are fractured cities. Over the last fifty years, these regions have evolved into disconnected neighborhoods segregated by economic class and race. In the high poverty neighborhoods or disadvantaged neighborhoods, there is a predominance of families and children of color.
- Families and children in disadvantaged neighborhoods experience the silent violence of poverty, i.e., they experience structural and personal barriers to opportunities for quality education, stable employment and a quality of life.
- In most metropolitan regions, there is a fracturing of regional governance structure, i.e., there is a diminished capacity to collaborate across the region for the common good. The region has a diminished capacity to address the silent violence of poverty in its most disadvantaged neighborhoods.
- The growth of policies, structures, and practices that contribute to the silent violence of poverty is a deeply troubling example of the structural of sins of poverty and racism.
- Over the last fifty years, there has been a movement of the Catholic population to more affluent suburbs. In many metropolitan regions, the response the Catholic Church was to move its resources, parishes and schools, to the more affluent neighborhoods of the region. This has resulted in a diminished presence of the Church in disadvantaged neighborhoods of the region.

These assertions lead me to ask an important question for the Catholic Church in our metropolitan regions -- “Have we as Catholics and the Catholic Church been complicit in the growth of these social sins of poverty and racism in our metropolitan regions?” It is very difficult for us as Catholics and as a Church to talk about this question. If you are like me, you are offended and defensive if someone says that you are indifferent to the poor and have an implicit bias toward people of color. In our defensiveness we tend to answer in a binary way – either “I am indifferent to the poor or deeply committed to them” – “I am a racist or without bias toward people of color.” This binary way of responding keeps us from examining

whether we need to embark on a journey of deeper conversion and stronger commitment to regional solidarity.

The intent of this first section is to make a case that we as Catholics and the Catholic Church have been complicit or at the very least, we have been bystanders in the midst of the growing poverty and racism in our metropolitan regions. In the next section, I indicated that an option for the poor, the theme of this conference, and the journey to regional solidarity provides a way to address the social sins of poverty and racism.

## **Part II: Judge – Why Should the Church Exercise an Option for the Poor in a Metropolitan Region**

In the previous section, two images, The Fractured City and the Silent Violence of Poverty, help illustrate the injustice of poverty and racism in our metropolitan regions. In this section, Pope Francis' challenge to be "a poor Church for the Poor" presents a vision for why we should exercise an option for the poor. Second, a short description of regional solidarity is provided and its relationship to the "option of the poor."

### **A Church that Exercises an Option for the Poor**

In the first conversation with journalists the day after his election, Pope Francis stated that he wanted "a poor Church for the poor". Over the past five years, he has consistently stressed this message. In an address at the Patriarchal Church of St. George in Istanbul, Turkey, he said:

In today's world, voices are being raised which we cannot ignore, and which implore our Churches to live deeply our identity as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The first of these voices is that of the poor. In the world, there are too many women and men who suffer from severe malnutrition, growing unemployment, a rising number of unemployed youth, and from increasing social exclusion. These can give rise to criminal activity and even the recruitment of terrorists. We cannot remain indifferent before the cries of our brothers and sisters. These ask of us not only material assistance – needed in so many circumstances – but above all, our help to defend their dignity as human persons, so that they can find the spiritual energy to become once again protagonists in their own lives. They ask us to fight, in light of the Gospel, the structural causes of poverty: inequality, the shortage of dignified work and housing, and the denial of their rights as members of society and as workers. As Christians we are called together to eliminate that globalization of indifference which today seems to reign supreme, while building a new civilization of love and solidarity.<sup>10</sup>

This is a forceful statement of Francis' vision for a Church that exercises an option for the poor. Outlined below are several themes that provide a framework for faith formation for journey to region solidarity.

### **Growing as Missionary Disciples**

Pope Francis invites us to a personal encounter with Jesus. "I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day." (EG 3) This encounter with Jesus leads us to be missionary disciples. "Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are 'disciples' or 'missionaries', but rather we are "missionary disciples." (EG 120) It is through an encounter with Jesus, through

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<sup>10</sup> Address of Pope Francis at the Patriarchal Church of St. George, Istanbul, Turkey  
[http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2014/documents/papa-francesco\\_20141130\\_divina-liturgia-turchia.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20141130_divina-liturgia-turchia.html).

conversion, reconversion, and proclamation of the Good News that the Holy Spirit transforms us into the likeness of Christ.

### **Multiplying Communities of Encounter and Dialogue**

Pope Francis is a strong critic of our contemporary culture and a strong proponent of building a culture of encounter characterized by dialogue.

We live in a culture of conflict, a culture of fragmentation, a culture in which I throw away what is of no use to me, a culture of waste. ... [We] must go out to meet them (others), and with our faith we must create a “culture of encounter,” a culture of friendship, a culture in which we find brothers and sisters, in which we can also speak with those who think differently, as well as those who hold other beliefs, who do not have the same faith.<sup>11</sup>

We must create a culture of encounter, and we must go out ourselves, because Jesus calls the Church to be a missionary. We create a culture of encounter through a deep faith and in dialogue with others in the midst of differences and even polarization.

Whenever Pope Francis talks to civic leaders, his message always emphasizes dialogue in the public forum. Dialogue must replace conflict and confrontation. Pope Francis believes that dialogue is integral to the growth of individuals, families, and societies. It is only through a culture of encounter where dialogue allows each individual and group, with different perspectives and mindsets, to contribute a gift to the conversation and at the same time learn something by deeply listening to others. Dialogue allows us not only to give, but also to receive.

### **Being with and for the Poor**

From the very beginning of his Pontificate, Pope Francis has demonstrated through his actions and his speeches that he wants a “Church of and for the Poor.” Pope Francis’s first call to us is to move to the peripheries. He has advocated that the Church move to the existential peripheries of life, which, in the case of our metropolitan regions, are our high-poverty neighborhoods. He has strongly advocated that as members of the Church we should be present to the poor and encounter them in a very personal way. It is important that we take time to share in their experiences and stories. He emphasizes the need to listen to the stories of alienation that come from the “violence of poverty” -- the stories of persons who lack food, who are homeless or without decent shelter, who cannot find adequate care for their children. These stories enable members of the Church to touch the flesh of Christ and develop the compassion needed to act in solidarity with the poor and to collaborate with them to undertake the necessary transformations of society.

### **Living Simply and Generously**

Addressing the silent violence of poverty in our metropolitan regions will require a more just and thoughtful sharing of resources across the metropolitan region. The Fractured City and the Silent Violence of Poverty are a highly complex set of problems without easy answers. If the Church of the metropolitan region is to be a catalyst and partner in addressing the silent violence of poverty, then the members of the Church develop a spirituality that allows them to live more simply and generously. This will not be a panacea, but I believe it is important for three reasons. First, it will allow faith communities and local parishes to support the work of the regional Church to address the silent violence of poverty. Having the resources to support its organization and programs is a critical requirement for the regional Church to undertake the journey toward regional solidarity. Second, living more simply and generously can help us develop compassion for those who suffer poverty and privation daily. We can listen attentively to the stories of others when we have the discipline of living simply. Third, I believe there

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<sup>11</sup> Pope Francis, Vigil of Pentecost with the Ecclesial Movements, May 18, 2013.

will be value in the Church's witness to living frugally and generously. It demonstrates that persons and families can experience happiness and joy, while not being overly concerned with consumption and comfort.

As we indicated earlier, Pope Francis has given strong personal witness to living frugally and simply. His example is a helpful discipline for us to be more aware of the voices of the poor.

“The Church is Mother, and must never forget the tragedy of her children. She too must be poor, to become fruitful and to respond to so much suffering. A poor Church is a Church that practices a voluntary simplicity in her own life -- in her institutions, in the lifestyle of her members -- to break down walls of separation, especially those that separate us from the poor.”<sup>12</sup>

Living simply and generously helps us more deeply encounter Jesus in our journey to become missionary disciples. Living simply and generously will also allow the regional Church to mobilize resources to address the silent violence of poverty and create metropolitan regions where there is greater justice, peace, and reconciliation.

### **Being a Prophetic Presence for Solidarity**

Pope Francis has demonstrated the importance of prophetic presence in the midst of society. Pope Francis has been a refreshing presence for the Church. He has used his bully pulpit to speak prophetically about the issues of justice on the local, the national, and the global levels. Pope Francis speaks prophetically by his witness to being present to the poor. He visits refugees and washes the feet of prisoners. He speaks prophetically in public forums. During his visit to the United States, in each venue, he spoke in a spirit of dialogue – building on shared values and beliefs – and was able to speak truths that raised questions about practices and structures within our metropolitan regions that inhibited respect for human dignity and justice.

Pope Francis is calling us to be a Church that is able to speak prophetically in a wide variety of settings. He has called members of the Church to reflect on their indifference to the plight of the poor. He has called us to witness to God's kingdom through our presence and encounter with the poor – listening to their experiences and stories and reflecting on desires and concerns that we share in common.

Pope Francis's call to a prophetic presence also requires members of the Church to develop a critique of society that with insight and coherence identifies the injustices of poverty and racism. A prophetic presence requires members of the Church to disrupt our regional social structure by speaking the truth to the powers that maintain the status quo of injustice. A prophetic presence requires members of the Church to collaborate with others to imagine a more just future and work to realize that future. Given the silent violence of poverty within our regions, the Catholic Church must be a disruptive force for advancing justice and a creative force for building the social architecture that is a greater realization of the common good.

### **Mobilizing Lay Leadership**

In addressing the Pontifical Council of the Laity in June 2016, Pope Francis stated his conviction that the responsibility for lay leadership comes from baptism and not from a “delegation from the hierarchy.”

We enter the Church through Baptism, not through priestly or episcopal ordination, we enter through Baptism! And, we have all entered through the same door. It is Baptism that makes every lay faithful a missionary disciple of the Lord, the salt of the earth, the light of the work, the leaven that transforms reality from within.

Pope Francis continues ...

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<sup>12</sup> General Audience, June 3, 2013.

We need lay people who are well formed in faith, animated by a clear and sincere faith, whose lives have been touched by personal and merciful encounters with the love of Jesus Christ. We need lay people who will take risks, soil their hands, who are not afraid of making mistakes, who move forward. We need lay people with a vision of the future, who are not enclosed in the petty things of life.

The hierarchy is a gift of the Holy Spirit that teaches, sanctifies, and governs the Church in the name and power of Jesus Christ. The hierarchy plays an essential role in building up and maintaining the Church's life of faith, the living of the Christian life in communion and charity, and the unity of the Church. The laity "seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will." "The initiative of lay Christians is necessary, especially when the matter involves discovering or inventing the means for permeating social, political, and economic realities with the demands of Christian doctrine and life." (CCC 898 and 899) The hierarchy and the laity work in communion for the good of the Church. A stronger mandate and mobilization of lay leadership is a necessary requirement for becoming a regional Church that exercise an option for the poor and undertakes the journey to regional solidarity.

I believe all of the faithful, laity, priest, and religious of conversion and reconversion informed by these six themes. It is only through personal conversion that the members of the Church can persevere in the difficult work of creating structures of solidarity inside the Church and in our regional community.

## **The Church and Regional Solidarity**

### **Regional Solidarity**

The virtue of solidarity helps understand how the Church can exercise an option for the poor in the context of our metropolitan regions. Solidarity is a communitarian principle and virtue developed in the Catholic social tradition over the last fifty years in response to the growing interdependence and complexity of society. It has integrated traditional concepts of justice, compassion and other social virtues to address major injustices that exist in society. As a moral virtue, solidarity is "a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good. That is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all responsible for all." (SRS 39) Solidarity applies to not only our relationships that are close, such as our extended family and neighborhood, but all relations with our neighbors that are at a distance.

From the Compendium of Social Doctrine, we realize that the virtue of solidarity urges persons and groups to overcome the structures of sins that dominate relationships between individuals and peoples in our metropolitan regions. These structures "must be purified and transformed into structures of solidarity through the creation or appropriate modification of laws, market regulations, and juridical systems." (CSD, 193).

Regional solidarity has three key elements:<sup>13</sup>

- The recognition of the interdependence of people in diverse neighborhoods of the region and regional institutions and their responsibility to all in the region, especially the poor.
- A firm commitment to the common good of the region, which requires transforming regional structures so they promote the participation and rights of all.
- A willingness to work with others across boundaries of class, race, ethnicity, religion, and organizational boundaries to foster an inclusive common good.

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<sup>13</sup> These three elements are suggested by Gerald J. Beyer, "Solidarity by Grace, Nature or Both? The Possibility of Human Solidarity in the Light of Evolutionary Biology and Catholic Theology", *The Heythrop Journal*, 2013, p 733.

In a talk to leaders of Labor Unions in Chicago, Cardinal Cupich outlined what he called the Church's consistent ethic of solidarity. A consistent ethic of regional solidarity "aims at making sure no one, from the first moment of life to natural death, from the wealthiest community to our poorest neighborhoods, is excluded from the table of life". By analogy, regional solidarity as a virtue is the firm and persevering determination by persons and groups advancing the common good of the metropolitan region. A consistent ethic of life applied to a metropolitan region aims to create a table of life in the region where no one, from the first moment of life to natural death, from the wealthiest neighborhood to our poorest neighborhood is excluded. There are two necessary conditions for creating this regional table of life. First, the regional community must have the capacity to transform the structures of poverty and racism that influence the silent violence of poverty. Second, it must be able to create new structures and processes where those suffering the silent violence of poverty develop the capacity to become artisans of their future and the future of the metropolitan region.

### **Regional Solidarity and "The Option for the Poor"**

Using the phrase "option for the poor" in conversations within the Church and within the greater regional community requires some nuance. The "option for the poor" in Catholic social thought originated with liberation theologians reflecting on the dramatic economic inequality of the many South American countries. Our social analysis illustrated because of the silent violence of the poverty, those that are poor are those without resources and opportunities for education, opportunities for work, and human fulfillment. This analysis also indicated that different neighborhoods in the region have different attitudes and perceptions of the poor and their reasons for being poor. An ethic of solidarity clearly indicates that our attitude toward the poor must have the following characteristics:

- Respect for human dignity – the poor are due respect as persons having the ability to be artisans of their future. As such, the poor are persons capable of growth and development in acting as agents with the capability of entering into mutual and reciprocal relationships for social change.
- Including the Voices of the Poor: In planning for social change to address the injustice of poverty and racism, it is important that persons suffering the silent violence of poverty have a voice.
- Capacity for Participation: Those suffering the silent violence of poverty must participate in framing the issues for change and in implementing the programs of change.

The next section will outline some approaches to undertaking the journey to regional solidarity.

### **Part III: Act – How Do We Undertake the Journey to Regional Solidarity?**

This section moves to the concrete strategies for undertaking the journey to regional solidarity. First, the concept of constructive conversations is outlined and two types of constructive conversations that are helpful for the journey to regional solidarity are identified. Second, strategies for undertaking the journey to regional solidarity are outlined.

#### **The Journey to Regional Solidarity through Constructive Conversations<sup>14</sup>**

In our work to create conditions of regional solidarity, we have used the guiding ideas of "constructive conversations" and "the virtues of constructive conversations."

**Constructive Conversations:** A constructive conversation involves a group of persons constructively exchanging views on a focus question that is important to the group. Examples of the focused question might be "What is our experience of racism in our community?" or "What is the cause of youth violence in our neighborhood?" Often these questions are very difficult and complex; the persons involved in the conversation have very different perspectives on the question; and often the question evokes strong

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<sup>14</sup> Our ideas on constructive conversation are an adaptation of the work of Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (Doubleday, New York, 1994), pp 174-204.

emotions. For the conversation to be constructive there must be a structure that opens the conversation with a period of dialogue followed by a period of deliberation. In the period of dialogue, the group opens up perspectives on the focus question, examines facts, explores meaning and promotes understanding. In the period of deliberation, the group narrows down the possible answers to the question and decides on an answer or important elements of an answer. In a good constructive conversation, someone documents the key outcomes of the conversation.

**Virtues of Constructive Conversations:** Over time, we have developed a set of virtues or practices necessary to commit to constructive conversations:

**A Culture of Encounter:** I will create opportunities for conversations on important questions that shape our society with persons, who not only share my perspectives, but also with people who hold different perspectives. In these encounters, I will respect the dignity of each person in the conversation.

### **Balancing Inquiry and Advocacy**

**Respectful Inquiry:** I will listen carefully and thoughtfully to arguments that are different from mine. I will suspend my judgment temporarily in an effort to understand the experiences, perspectives and logic of the others' arguments. I will ask questions that help me empathically understand their experiences, perspectives and logic. I will endeavor to understand their arguments before I argue against them.

**Honest Advocacy:** I will endeavor to grasp the issues involved in the question under consideration. I will make arguments based on my experience and perspectives and formulate arguments in a logically coherent manner. I will invite others to test my arguments and the experiences and/or the facts contained in my arguments. I will realize that others have different experiences and perspective on the question, and I will endeavor to respect and incorporate as much as possible their experiences and perspectives in my arguments.

**Openness to Learning:** I engage in conversations with others so that we together can enrich our personal and shared experiences, perspectives, and insights into the truth and the common good.

**Intellectual Humility:** I will always consider the possibility that my arguments may be deficient or wrong. When I come to the realization that my arguments are deficient or wrong, I will readily acknowledge it.

**Prophetic Courage:** When called for, I will speak clearly and forcefully for positions that I believe to be just and true, but that may be unpopular or even reviled. In these situations, I will persist in speaking for my position even when mine is a minority voice and there is a price to pay.

**Practical Wisdom:** I will work to develop the wisdom to know how to apply these virtues and habits in different situations. I will participate in public conversations in a way that ultimately contributes to the common good of my communities.

Growth in these virtues and habits requires thoughtful practice and then critical reflection on how I can improve my practice of them.

### **Different Types of Constructive Conversations**

In the journey to regional solidarity, we have found two types of constructive conversation particularly helpful.

**Constructive Conversations of Friendship:** This conversation brings people together people from different neighborhoods of the Fractured City and create a structure where they can share their different stories and experiences with the intent of developing a friendship. For example, a conversation of friendship could bring together participants from white suburbs and from distressed neighborhoods of color. The conversation can be structured by the question, "What has been your experience of racism in our regional community?" While it seems like a simple question, our experience is that it can often



produce strong emotions in the participants. We have found it helpful to introduce this type of conversation with a short presentation on the virtues of constructive conversation.

Conversations of friendship can be organized in a variety of ways. For example, the closing of the only Catholic hospital in the city that left a vacuum of service in African American neighborhoods. A group with representatives of religious communities and personnel from Catholic agencies in the city want to mobilize a constructive response. It was clear that these Catholic agencies were conducting some very good services in these neighborhoods. Yet, the group thought something more was needed. To start an exploration, the group met with teachers at one Catholic school in the neighborhood, and parents, to explore what services were needed and how could these services be more effectively delivered. This conversation allowed a rich sharing of experiences and stories and led to formulating a direction for moving forward. The friendships became a basis of trust and a commitment to work together.

**Constructive Conversation for Action:** Once people have developed a friendship with each other, they are in a position to enter into Constructive Conversations for Action. Constructive Conversations for Action aimed at transforming structures of the sin of poverty and racism into structures of solidarity that promote justice and reconciliation. Undertaking this transformation of structures constitutes an adaptive challenge. An adaptive challenge, like the transformation of structures, requires new learning and innovation by the participants as they frame the problem to be addressed and to invent appropriate solutions. Technical or expert knowledge alone is not sufficient to transform structures.

Undertaking the transformation of structures involves a multitude of factors:

- **Addressing Complexity** – requires a system perspective because there are many interacting factors and actors that have created the structures of sin.
- **Bring a Diversity of Perspectives to the Table** – there are competing underlying values that often require tough choices and trade-offs. People in the different neighborhoods see the issues differently and often when talking about changing structures emotion runs high.
- **Developing Ownership of the Problem and the Solutions** – in order to implement changes there has to be ownership of the problem and the solutions by the key stakeholders.
- **Engaging in a Sequence of Constructive Conversation** – Key stakeholders must be engaged in a sequence of conversations in which they frame the adaptive challenge, create and deliberate on solutions, implement the chosen solution, and evaluate change and learn. The conversations require the participants to engage in creative thinking and innovation. Constructive conversations enable the application of collective wisdom and sound judgement.

In Constructive Conversation for Action, we have found it helpful to take participants in the conversation through the questions of the four phases of Catholic social practice<sup>15</sup>:

- **SEE** – How do we frame the adaptive challenge of injustice we wish to address?
- **JUDGE** – What solutions can we create to the adaptive challenge and how do we deliberate to choose the appropriate solution?
- **ACT** – How do we organize people and mobilize resources to implement our solution?
- **REFLECT** – How do we evaluate the changes that took place and what have we learned?

A case study of a Conversation of Action, *Breaking the Cycle of Poverty* can be found on the Fr. Ferree Professor of Social Justice Website at the University of Dayton.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Appendix A provides a more detailed set of questions.

<sup>16</sup>[https://udayton.edu/artssciences/endowedchair/ferree/resources/images\\_files/cycle-of-poverty.pdf](https://udayton.edu/artssciences/endowedchair/ferree/resources/images_files/cycle-of-poverty.pdf)

## **A Church that is a Catalyst and Partners in the Journey to Regional Solidarity**

I conclude these reflections by briefly outlining six strategies for the journey to regional solidarity. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops have offered pastoral reflections on overcoming the social sin of poverty (*A Place at the Table, 2002*) and the social sin of racism (*Open Wide Our Hearts, 2018*). The Conference has also developed an excellent set of resources to supplement these pastoral reflections.<sup>17</sup> *A Place at the Table* issues the following challenge. “In the Catholic tradition, concern for the poor is advanced by individual and common action, works of charity, efforts to achieve a more just social order, the practice of virtue, and the pursuit of justice in our own lives. It requires action to confront structures of injustice that leave people poor. *Open Wide Our Hearts* contains the challenge “Racism can only end if we contend with the policies and institutional barriers that perpetuated and preserved the inequality – economic and social – that we still see all around us.” What is required now is for the Church of the metropolitan regions to develop and implement a comprehensive strategy that will enable it to be a catalyst and partner in overcoming the social sins of poverty and racism. The regional Catholic Church needs to undertake the journey to regional solidarity.

### **1. Develop a spirituality of solidarity and an appreciation of the social sin of poverty and racism in our metropolitan regions.**

Structural change required to overcome the social sins of racism and poverty requires a group of persons deeply imbued with spirituality of solidarity. This requires a concerted effort to preach on the personal responsibility for solidarity, to integrate the Bishops’ resources into a parish religious education and adult formation programs. These resources should be integrated into the curriculum of our Catholic Schools and Universities. The programs education must not only conduct social analysis of the injustice of poverty and race in a given metropolitan region but must engage people in the experience and stories of people experiencing the injustice of poverty and racism. These experiences and stories can touch the hearts of Catholics and bring them to a conversion of heart by allowing them to examine their implicit bias to people in poverty and to people of color as well as their contributions to social sins of poverty and racism.

### **2. Rebuild or Sustain a Catholic Urban Presence in One or More Disadvantaged Neighborhood of the metropolitan region.**

One important element in the Church’s effort to combat systematic poverty would be the rebuilding or sustaining a Catholic presence in one or more disadvantaged neighborhoods, especially in neighborhoods with a high percentage of people of color. This Catholic presence could serve one or more of the following purposes:

- To provide children with an education pathway that could include early child-care, quality early learning and excellent primary education;
- To provide parents with the knowledge and skills needed to build strong families, support their children’s learning, develop economic self-sufficiency;
- To partner with people of the neighborhood in organizing the assets of their neighborhood and developing programs that will improve the quality of life;
- To provide an evangelizing outreach in the neighborhood; and
- To provide the experience of hospitality and dialogue for members of the regional Church to share experiences and stories.

### **3. Bridge and Heal the Fractured Regional Church.**

Our metropolitan region is fractured and often our regional Catholic Church is also fractured. Pew Research illustrates that the Catholic Church nearly mirrors the fractured nature of our larger society. There is a major gap between the experience and assumptions of Catholics in the suburbs and the

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<sup>17</sup> These resources are available at <http://www.usccb.org/>.

experience and assumptions of Catholics and others in disadvantage neighborhoods. The regional Church has made some efforts to bridge and heal these fractures. For example, there has been the twinning of parishes within metropolitan regions. In my judgement, a more comprehensive effort is required.

The Catholic urban presence, outline above, can be a site to host opportunities for conversations among people of the different neighborhoods in which they share personal experiences and stories. Out of these conversations, friendships can grow, providing a starting point for healing, reconciliation, and common action. Creating spaces for encounter and dialogue where people of diverse experiences can come together is critical for healing the injustice of poverty and race within the metropolitan region.

#### **4. Create and Participate in Forums of Public Deliberations on the Common Good.**

To be a catalyst and partner in addressing the injustice of poverty and racism requires that Catholics participate in public deliberations on the common good with knowledge, civility and compassion. Public discourse in our country is often highly polarized and this discourse cannot create a consensus on a way to enhance the common good. Parishes and regional offices of Catholic social action and Catholic Charities should develop educational programs that help Catholics develop the skills to participate in public deliberation in a way that creates greater consensus across differences. These educational programs must incorporate the best practice skills of hosting and facilitating encounter and dialogue with the insights of our Catholic social tradition.

The Catholic Church, along with other faith communities, can create spaces for encounter and dialogue. In these spaces, the hard work can be done of understanding the injustice of poverty and racism within the region, creatively imagining a new future of greater economic and racial justice, designing strategies to bring about this new future, and organizing people and resources to implement the strategies. Only with serious Catholic engagement in public deliberation, along with other persons and groups of faith and goodwill, will the Church be a catalyst for a movement toward economic and racial justice and solidarity within our metropolitan regions.

#### **5. Organize a Regional Synod on the Journey to Regional Solidarity.**

Pope Francis has been encouraging “synodality” within every level of the Church where people can listen to one another, learn from each other and take responsibility for proclaiming the Gospel. Several dioceses have used Synods as a way of planning to implement follow-up on the Bishops Synod on the Family and Pope Francis’ Apostolic Exhortation *The Joy of Love*.<sup>18</sup> A similar approach can be used to implement a personal Synod on Regional Solidarity.

#### **6. Create a post-parochial financial strategy to support these efforts of healing and reconciliation.**

For the most part, the Catholic Church has pursued a parochial financial strategy, i.e., if a parish cannot develop the resources to support its sacramental and pastoral and educational ministries, then the leadership of the diocese will make a decision to close it or merge with another parish. There have been many innovative efforts to go beyond this parochial financial strategy. Yet, if our Church is going to be a catalyst and partner in healing the injustice of poverty and racism and creating strategies to bring about a greater realization of the common good, then our Church must develop post-parochial financial strategies that will support this effort. These strategies will demand that we as Catholics stretch ourselves to be more generous in supporting the Church’s task of promoting solidarity with the metropolitan region.

### **Conclusion**

This paper provides a report on the experience of colleagues at the University of Dayton and social justice advocates in the community in addressing the problems of poverty and race in a metropolitan area. The

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<sup>18</sup> A good example of a Diocesan Synod is the one organized in the Diocese of San Diego by Bishop McElroy <https://www.sdatholic.org/en-us/diocese/synodonthefamily/background.aspx>.

paper is organized around three important questions: What is the situation of poverty and race in our metropolitan regions?, Why should the Church exercise an option for the poor in metropolitan areas?, and How does the Church undertake the Journey to Regional Solidarity?

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## Appendix A: The Process of Catholic Social Practice

Phases	Questions
<p><b>See clearly the situation:</b> <i>Listen</i> to the voices of those impacted by injustice and together <i>define an issue</i> to be addressed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What in the experience and stories of those suffering injustice helps us understand their social situation?</li> <li>• What relational, institutional or cultural elements are presenting problems or barriers to human flourishing for people suffering injustice?</li> <li>• What assets, especially among the people suffering injustice, can be used to bring about change?</li> <li>• The current institutional and cultural arrangements are stable because they serve the interest of one or more groups. Whose interest is being served by the current arrangements?</li> <li>• What ideas provide a rationale for the current institutional arrangement - the current patterns of injustice?</li> <li>• Who promotes these ideas? How do we bring about change in these ideas?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Judge with principles to foster integral human development:</b> Together <i>imagine</i> a more just future and <i>deliberate</i> on the strategies to realize this future</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there a common ground among the stakeholders for a shared desired future (a vision of that advances the common good) for the situation we are addressing?</li> <li>• Do the least advantaged see the desired future as a good?</li> <li>• Whose thinking must change and how must it change if we want to realize this shared vision?</li> <li>• How do we create a strategy to realize the shared vision that will mobilize the key assets and overcome the key problems and barriers that we have identified?</li> <li>• Will our strategy disrupt (change or transform) the social structures that support these problems and barriers?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Act to advance the common good:</b> <i>Mobilize</i> persons and financial resources to implement the strategy and <i>adapt</i> to changing circumstances</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do we mobilize people in order to implement our strategy?</li> <li>• How can we mobilize resources needed to support our strategy?</li> <li>• How can we adjust our plans as we encounter surprises?</li> <li>• How do we keep people motivated and focused on the vision of justice?</li> <li>• What resistance are we encountering and what thinking is behind this resistance?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Reflect with humility:</b> <i>Evaluate</i> by comparing the actual outcomes to the desired outcomes and <i>learn</i> how to do better in the future</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What surprises did we encounter during the change process?</li> <li>• What did these surprises tell us about assumptions, our vision for change, and our strategy?</li> <li>• What do we need to change in order to advance justice?</li> <li>• How did the changes affect the least advantaged?</li> </ul>