

**DREW UNIVERSITY**

**ABUNDANT LIFE**

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**Doctor of Ministry**

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## **ABSTRACT**

**TO UNDERSTAND INTERPRETATIONS OF  
ABUNDANT LIFE  
FROM WHITE MEN ON THE NORTH SHORE OF LONG ISLAND AND  
DISCOVER WHAT DRIVES ENGAGEMENT IN MINISTRIES OF  
JUSTICE, OPPORTUNITY, AND EQUALITY,  
LEADING BEYOND WHITE PRIVILEGE**

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The purpose of this project was to discover various interpretations and meanings of the phrase *Abundant Life* using the biblical text from John 10:10 by listening to and learning the stories and experiences of white, Christian men in the privileged communities of the North Shore of Long Island. Through reflexive listening, I discovered contemporary definitions of what it means to be a white male today and compared that with past understandings. By studying the text with a small group of white men, I learned new and different interpretations that lead to transformation and engagement in work to bring justice, opportunity, and equality for all. I also provide insights as to why white men engage (or do not engage) in social justice ministries.

I believe that many white men feel they are facing an “identity crisis” today. With the rapidly changing social, political, and racial landscape of our society, long-standing issues such as immigration, environmental justice, equality, legal support, economic

opportunity, education, have even more importance. With the increase of women in leadership and increasing numbers of people with different ethnicities speaking out, demanding to be heard, I believe the “power” white men have in the U.S. is being challenged. Through this project, I learned the stories, struggles, fears, and questions several white men have about their future and learned common motivating factors that have led some white men in this context to work for opportunity and life-giving ministries. I discovered that through empathy and engagement with the pain and suffering of people from different communities and experiences, transformation occurs possibly leading to engagement to work for justice, opportunity, and equality for all. I hope that through deep listening and identifying these motivating factors, I will be able to help others do the same, leading to new possibilities for more people in our surrounding communities.

## **DEDICATION**

To my wife, Gina, who for twenty-seven years has stood by me and provided constant love, support, and encouragement. You are my rock, my partner, and my life.

To my Mother-In-Law, my Mom, Betty, who encouraged me throughout my life, in business and in ministry. You supported my decision to enter the Doctor of Ministry program, and I know you are celebrating with me in heaven.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION AND MINISTERIAL CONTEXT

### Introduction

*"I can't breathe!"*<sup>1</sup> These were the last words spoken by Eric Garner, a black man, after several white NYPD officers had taken him down and placed him in a choke hold on July 17, 2014. Eric was just standing on a street, "breaking up a fight," witnesses reported. He was "smart, generous, and tried to keep the peace so the cops wouldn't come after us." He died due to the brutal actions of the police officers, in front of many witnesses, even while repeating eleven times the infamous phrase, *"I can't breathe!"*

Unfortunately, this same phrase can be spoken by far too many people in our homes, in our neighborhoods, in our nation, and around the world. I cannot imagine what people like Eric Garner feel every day. The recent shootings of unarmed black males by white police officers has heightened the awareness of the bias and bigotry that lives at the core of our society.

Personally, I have had very different life experiences from much of the nation. I have lived my entire life with *White Privilege*, defined as "benefits for a group of people whom society identifies as "white," beyond what is commonly experienced by anyone else under the same social, political, or economic circumstances."<sup>2</sup> Because of my status, I have been afforded many benefits and opportunities, seen and unseen, that have allowed me to *breathe* in ways too many others do not. In this project, I am addressing this very problem as a defining and important naming in the research. It will be challenging in many ways, since I am interviewing those who benefit to reflect on the impacts white privilege has on themselves and those around them who are not white.

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<sup>1</sup> "I Can't Breathe' Examines Modern Policing and the Life and Death of Eric Garner," National Public Radio, Inc., October 23, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/2017/10/23/559498678/i-can-t-breathe-explores-life-and-death-at-the-hands-of-police>.

<sup>2</sup> Definition attributed to Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," *Independent School* 49, no. 2 (1990).

Today, our nation is divided. This is not an entirely new situation for the United States. There have been many times in our history when our country has not been united. Currently, a myriad of beliefs, opinions, and motivations pull us apart. In the past, divisions over slavery and women's rights have caused rifts, sometimes within the same family. These divisions create tension that currently is at a very high level in our nation, in our churches, in our schools, and in our communities. Racism seems to run rampant through every corner, every sector of our lives. Women are still fighting to earn a comparable wage and break through the glass ceiling. The LGBTQ community is still not accepted, not seen as or treated as equal in many areas of the United States. The poor are continuously stigmatized, marginalized, and worse yet, locked in to their status in life.

With the election of Donald Trump as president in 2016, old debates were rekindled as new ones began. Early in 2019, the president declared a State of Emergency to provide funding for the continuation of a wall along our Southern Border with Mexico. Trump stated throughout his campaign and throughout the first two years of his time in office that this would be a very high priority on his agenda. It would appear to many that his goal is to build a wall to keep people out, people that are not like us, people that speak a different language, people who eat different foods, listen to different music, wear different clothing, and have different color skin.

Is there a correlation between the practice of building walls and white privilege? This practice of building walls has taken a toll in the United States. Here I am not referring only of the type of wall the president wants. I am also including the walls we build in our minds and in our hearts. The walls that separate "us" from "them," who is "in" and who is "out." The walls that prevent people from living a healthy and full life. I believe that white privilege impacts whole segments of people and contributes to the walls that divide us.

Racism is one of these walls. It permeates virtually every facet of our society, and it is not relegated to just the "secular" world; this evil is prevalent in the Church as well. In the New York Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church (UMC), there are churches that are known to "chew pastors up and spit them back out." In other words, the leadership, the decision-makers of the church, push their own agenda hard, making it difficult for the pastor to lead the congregation in a new direction. In these settings,

clergy are challenged at every turn, then blamed for failing, which often leads to burn-out.

One example of the multiple layers which effect the church and leadership within the church as the UMC works toward an inclusive community involves a black woman currently serving on the East end of Long Island. At the Introduction Meeting,<sup>3</sup> leaders of the local church questioned the District Superintendent saying, “How do you expect us to tell the rest of the town that we have a black pastor?” On the east end of Long Island, there is a strong presence of the Ku Klux Klan. In fact, this same pastor, who drives 65 miles to support the church on a part-time basis, was instructed that she should “park her car in the garage of the parsonage. When the Klan meet at the firehouse directly across the street, if they see your car in the driveway, there may be trouble.” This pastor has shared with me that she feels abandoned, alone, and afraid. After the years of work she invested to answer the call God has placed in her, I can only imagine that the oppression she feels from her white parishioners leads her to say, *“I can’t breathe!”*

The effects of racism go beyond the black community. The current crisis along our Southern Border is yet another example of this terrible injustice. Countless families try to emigrate from countries in Central and South America, as well as other nations around the world, to escape persecution and danger. According to the International Rescue Committee, worldwide, there are approximately “68.5 million men, women, and children escaping war, persecution, and political turbulence.”<sup>4</sup> Many people seeking asylum come to the United States for the hope of protection and a new life. They come from nations like El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, with “well-founded fear of persecution if they were to return home.”<sup>5</sup> They are looking for a better life; for some, a life they have seen on television, portraying the United States as a nation of opportunity and equality for all. However, recent U.S. policies have tightened, preventing immigrants the chance to enter, and putting others at risk of deportation. The 2018 “zero tolerance

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<sup>3</sup> Part of the Itinerant Process for clergy in the United Methodist Church. A District Superintendent will gather with members of the Local Church Staff Parish Relations Committee to “introduce” a new pastor that is being appointed to the church.

<sup>4</sup> “Migrants, Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Immigrants: What’s the Difference?” International Rescue Committee, Last updated December 11, 2018, <https://www.rescue.org/article/migrants-asylum-seekers-refugees-and-immigrants-whats-difference>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

policy” led to the separation of families. Parents and children, who crossed the border seeking asylum, were split up. Children were held in different buildings, some going weeks, even months without seeing their loved ones. Instead of a being a nation that welcomes people, encouraging everyone to follow their dreams for the betterment of all, our current policy seems to be to build a wall, to, according to Trump, stop “bad hombres”<sup>6</sup> from coming in. Witnessing the plight of these families, listening to their anguish as immigrant parents are separated from their children, I hear their hearts and bodies crying out, “*I can’t breathe!*”

The LGBTQ community has faced prejudice, discrimination, and violence throughout U.S. history. In recent decades, all sorts of labels, slurs, and blame has been hurled at these children of God. When I was growing up, the HIV/AIDS epidemic was referred to as the “Gay Death Sentence.” I was taught that their “rampant promiscuity” and “deviant ways” gave them “exactly what they deserved.” In our society today, homophobia is a hot topic, dividing the nation on the definition of marriage and the rights for full inclusion in all aspects of life in society. This is another example of a wall that separates, defining who is in and who is out, blocking so many from being their true selves, preventing them from living a full, authentic life.

The discrimination felt by the LGBTQ community leads many to hide their sexual orientation by trying to “pass” as heterosexual in society. For example, while I worked in business in Connecticut, a new colleague joined our team. After a few months, she confided in me that she is a lesbian. She was afraid to tell people about her sexuality as she previously suffered a lack of respect in the workplace as well as violence from attackers on the street. Past violence and injustices keep many LGBTQ people “in the closet.” Too much of the time, society has “looked the other way” when incidents of violence against gays has occurred. On August 20, 2016, Omar Villalobos was walking in New York City with a friend, when someone yelled out a gay slur, then punched him in the face. As his face bled, Omar approached nearby police officers and reported what happened. One of the officers replied, “Go find someone who cares. We’re here for

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<sup>6</sup> Vivian Salama, “Trump to Mexico: Take Care of ‘Bad Hombres’ or U.S. Might,” *Associated Press News*, February 2, 2017, <https://www.apnews.com/0b3f5db59b2e4aa78cdbbf008f27fb49>.

terrorist attacks, not homeless people.”<sup>7</sup> Even some police, who are supposed to protect citizens, may be reluctant to believe or help with these types of bias-motivated crimes, since ‘violence between gay lovers is considered natural.’<sup>8</sup>

My own denomination, the United Methodist Church, held a Special Session of the General Conference to “decide on the issue” of human sexuality and gender identity. Currently, the denominational stance is that homosexuality is “incompatible with Christian teachings.”<sup>9</sup> Recently, as a punishable offense, pastors that identify as “self-avowed, practicing homosexuals,” or clergy who take an active part in same-sex weddings, have been brought to trial and been defrocked. For forty-seven years, the denomination has wrestled and even fought over the “correct stance.” At this conference, several plans were presented, some with the intent to try to stay “united,” such as the One Church Plan. This plan would allow for contextual understanding and practice by giving local churches the authority to decide for themselves how best to minister to the LGBTQ community. Various plans presented at this Conference would have opened the path for full inclusion at least to some extent. Full inclusion here is defined as allowing members of the LGBTQ community to answer the call to licensed and ordained ministry, as well as sharing in the sacred vows of marriage within our local churches. A slight majority of delegates at this General Conference, however, chose a different path.

By a vote of 438 to 384 (53% to 47%), the Conference voted to support the Traditional Plan, which maintains and strengthens the current stance of our UMC Book of Discipline stating, “homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teachings.” Of note, the US delegation voted 66% against the Traditional Plan. This plan retains the restrictive language and enacts stricter penalties, including expulsion of clergy from the Church. Much of the Traditional Plan has already been ruled “unconstitutional” by the Judicial Council and will be reviewed by this court in April 2019. This is a very painful moment

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<sup>7</sup> Alamin Yohannes, “Gay Man Attacked in NYC Speaks Out,” *NBC News*, August 29, 2016, <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/gay-man-attacked-nyc-speaks-out-n637846>.

<sup>8</sup> Donna Minkowitz, “Murder Will Out, but it’s Still Open Season on Gays,” *The Nation*, March 23, 1992, 368.

<sup>9</sup> United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* - 2016 (The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), Par. 304. Article 3.

in the life of the denomination, as so many LGBTQ brothers and sisters feel abandoned, hurt, even “erased.”<sup>10</sup>

Government has changed course regarding LGBTQ inclusion. President Trump has gone back on his word from the campaign trail, where he claimed he would be the first Republican to support LGBTQ rights.<sup>11</sup> Within his first year, he nominated many anti-LGBT judges to the Federal Courts, proposed and enacted a ban on transgender people to serve in the Armed Forces, and supported the “freedom of speech” case of a bakery that refused LGBT customers work – setting the precedent for other businesses and organizations to follow.<sup>12</sup> Not surprisingly, anti-LGBT hate crimes rose in Washington, D.C. as well as many other cities over the last two years.<sup>13</sup>

More walls, more separation; I can imagine any LGBTQ person who has experienced violence and discrimination, who has not been allowed to live fully, who has been prevented from claiming who they are out loud for fear of the reaction of others may want to say, “*I can’t breathe!*”

Women also experience discrimination and violence. Harassment, assault, and abuse happen every day to thousands of women across our nation. Throughout the world on a daily basis, women are degraded, objectified, and even trafficked for the sexual pleasure of deviant men. They are paid less and often expected to do more to earn the pay they receive, as The Economic Policy Institute reports.<sup>14</sup> The current pay gap is about 80 cents to the dollar for full-time working women. When considering race, the numbers are worse. Black women earn an average of 65 cents and Hispanic women earn approximately 58 cents to the dollar compared to white men. It is of note that this gap does not lessen with additional education.

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<sup>10</sup> The General Conference vote was taken on February 26, 2019. This paper was written while the vote occurred. The long-term effects of this action are still unknown.

<sup>11</sup> President Trump held up a Pride Flag and mentioned he would be the person to finally move his party on LGBTQ issues at the 2016 Republican Convention in Cleveland Ohio.

<sup>12</sup> German Lopez, “Trump Promised to be LGBTQ-Friendly. His First Year in Office Proved it Was a Giant Con,” *Vox*, January 22, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/identities/2018/1/22/16905658/trump-lgbtq-anniversary>.

<sup>13</sup> Lou Chibarro Jr., “D.C. Sees Alarming Increase in Anti-LGBT Hate Crimes in 2018,” *Washington Blade*, February 6, 2019, <https://www.washingtonblade.com/2019/02/06/d-c-sees-alarming-increase-in-anti-lgbt-hate-crimes-in-2018/>.

<sup>14</sup> Kathleen Geier, Elsie Gould, and Jessica Schieder, “What Is the Gender Pay Gap and Is It Real?” *Economic Policy Institute*, October 20, 2016, <https://www.epi.org/publication/what-is-the-gender-pay-gap-and-is-it-real/#epi-toc-9>.

The recent “Me Too” movement has brought to light just how pervasive sexual harassment and assault is. Thousands of women have felt empowered to come forward and tell their story and be heard. Women have experienced despicable acts of discrimination, harassment, and assault, even with well-respected, high profile men, such as Matt Lauer formerly of the Today Show<sup>15</sup>, and comedian, Bill Cosby.<sup>16</sup> But sexism is not always so overt.

Sexism can also be subtle and assumed too much of the time. In 2015, Harvard University Voices of Diversity completed a study<sup>17</sup> showing that “microaggressions” are all too common on many college campuses. Women and people of color are made to feel like they are *lucky* to be students at these institutions. They *must* have been admitted because of affirmative action. In the workplace, Hannah Webster<sup>18</sup> provides examples of subtle sexism going beyond pay inequity. Webster interviewed Kathy Higgins, a vice president with Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina. Higgins offers the term “meeting plagiarism,” meaning that too often, the ideas of women presented in meetings are discarded until a man mentions it, who in turn receives the credit.

In the New York Annual Conference where I serve, women do not always have the same opportunities as men. In the United Methodist Church, the Bishop appoints pastors to their settings on an annual basis. Currently, at the Conference level, the Cabinet is made up mostly of men. The District Superintendents are evenly split, three men and three women. But men hold virtually all the other positions on the appointment and extended cabinet. For the most part, men also fill the roles at larger churches and full-time appointments, holding a disproportionately high percentage of the highest paying

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<sup>15</sup> Michelle Mark, “A Former NBC Employee Has Accused Matt Lauer of Locking Her in His Office and Sexually Assaulting Her During the Workday,” *Business Insider*, November 30, 2017, <https://www.businessinsider.com/matt-lauer-accused-sexual-assaulting-nbc-employee-office-2017-11>.

<sup>16</sup> Aaron Cooper and Eric Levenson, “Bill Cosby Sentenced to 3 to 10 Years in Prison for Sexual Assault,” CNN, September 26, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/09/25/us/bill-cosby-sentence-assault/index.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Alexandra Svokos, “College Campuses Are Full of Subtle Racism and Sexism, Study Says,” *Huffington Post*, January 12, 2015, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/microaggressions-college-racism-sexism\\_n\\_6457106](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/microaggressions-college-racism-sexism_n_6457106).

<sup>18</sup> Hannah Webster, “Subtle Sexism: 10 Things You Could Be Encountering Daily at Work,” [www.wral.com](http://www.wral.com), July 13, 2018, <https://www.wral.com/subtle-sexism-10-things-you-could-be-encountering-daily-at-work/17287193/>.

pastoral positions. This problem, at least in part, stems from sexist views of the role of women in our church and in the world.

Again, I will point to leadership. During the 2016 campaign, President Trump said many vulgar things about women, even about his own daughter. It was an exercise in the power of an image that during the campaign, Trump seemed to loom in a menacing manner over Hillary Clinton during a national debate, while constantly interrupting her throughout their time together. These signals and actions by any leader teach and reinforce the lesson of men dominating women, which may have long-lasting and far-reaching impacts.

When I first began full-time ministry, I was told by senior white males in our Conference that I was being groomed for leadership in larger churches. “Women cannot take on the challenges that comes with bigger ministries. They will be busy having children, caring for their families, and working on overdrive to control their emotions when things go wrong or difficulties arise. Men are more equipped for the role.” I was shocked. How could this thinking exist with clergy, in the church, in 2005, in the New York City area? I believed this must be one isolated thought of a misguided leader. But a few years later, I realized sexism in the church was much more widespread than I realized. Listening to the stories of friends and colleagues, I heard them struggling to stand up for themselves. Today, as they continue to battle against the stigma and perceptions of women in the workplace and the church, my sisters continue to suffer. Weighed down and even blocked by male egos, longing for true equality and the freedom to live fully into the calling God has placed upon their hearts, I can imagine each sister crying out, “*I can’t breathe!*”

As a white, heterosexual, Protestant, middle-class, straight, able-bodied, male, I fall into the “dominant” group for many of the classes in which we categorize people. I have lived a sheltered life that flows from the “Cycle of Socialization”<sup>19</sup> presented by Bobbie Harro. This researcher suggests social identities begin at birth and are continuously reinforced throughout our lives. As I grew up, I did not experience people who were different than me. As an adult, this made it more difficult to relate to and understand anyone I met that was different. Through those around me, I developed my

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<sup>19</sup> See Appendix 1.

self-perceptions, learned the “rules” that defined my identity, and learned what was expected of me. This identity was given to me, at least initially. Only over time has it been possible for me to understand more how my identity fits into the larger society. I now recognize the importance of seeing the characteristics we inherit and what they mean in the world.

Once we recognize the social identities that make up each one of us, we begin to see the differences between people. These differences have built-in consequences related to how people are treated in society. “The dominant group dictates what is acceptable and desirable. Prejudice and discrimination can be tools used by the dominant group to maintain its control or power.”<sup>20</sup> In our history as a nation, white men have had power that has positioned them in the dominant group. Unfortunately, this power has not always been used to help others experience a better life.

Over the past several years, I have been “re-awakened” to the problems we face. Prejudice, power, and privilege are very important in the white world I live in. More and more, I have seen in the larger society, as well as in the local area where I live and serve, the depth of the injustice and the lack of equality and opportunity for so many. I have looked for examples of good and just leadership within my own church, in our connectional structure, and in our nation. I have also reflected on my own leadership and know that I, along with my parishioners and colleagues, must do so much more.

The “Unite the Right Rally” in Charlottesville really scared me. I was *not* so ignorant to think that white supremacy was gone, but I did not think that this type of rally, on a very well-known college campus, would take place. Armed white men with torches, shouting chants of hatred and racist slurs, eventually led to violence and even death. I could not believe in the United States, in 2017, that something like this could still happen. Later, Trump’s lack of compassion and care for those who were faced with this hatred, for standing up against this form of evil, for having their voice heard just like those that marched, and then, defending the actions of the “Alt-Right” movement, angered me.

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<sup>20</sup> Warren J. Blumenfeld and Diane Raymond, “Prejudice and Discrimination,” in *Looking at Gay and Lesbian Life* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 219.

I began to see a pattern of violence with a new perspective. This march was just evidence of the discrimination that has always been there. This is nothing new. The KKK and other hate groups are not new. Nor had they ever gone away. But more importantly, a hate group marching and chanting foul slogans isn't the only way discrimination happens. Hate groups have hurt women, LGBTQ people, immigrants, the poor, and many others. What I have noticed is just how "pocket-ized" we are as a community. We may be diverse as a nation, we may have diversity across Long Island and within our New York Annual Conference, but for the most part, it seems people associate with people who are just like them. We are not doing enough to get to know one another, to listen to one another, to learn from one another, and to stand up for one another.

After the Charlottesville march, something inside me finally said "Enough. I have to do more." That is when I decided to go back to school. I wanted to equip myself for the work I knew would lie ahead. At the time, I did not believe I knew enough about these wrongs embedded in the fabric of our everyday life. I did not possess the required knowledge or skills to lead and work with our church and the greater community. I also worried that I did not have enough *courage* to step out of my comfort zone and risk myself to work for systemic change. But watching the terror in Charlottesville unfold changed me. This "Courageous Leadership" degree was exactly what I needed at exactly the right time. I knew this journey would help me not only become a better leader, but to shift my ministry and that of the church I serve, to help others live life more abundantly.

I am now much more aware of the many struggles in our nation that cause division, isolation and harm for too many people. These problems result from the injustice of policies and social practices that lead many to a life of poverty, to a lack of good education, and to the recent police shootings of black men by white cops. Many women suffer discrimination and inequities of all kind, as do people of color. Discrimination and dehumanization of the LGBTQ community harm millions in the U.S. and are currently tearing my denomination apart.

Through my project, I learned the deep stories and experiences of white men through reflexive listening. I discovered more about what it means to be a white man in our society today and the challenges these men and our society face. I also found

common motivating factors that may “awaken” white men to join and work with others for justice, opportunity, and equality for all.

### **Centerport and the North Shore of Long Island**

When my wife, Gina, and I first arrived in Centerport, NY six years ago, we were surprised by the beauty of the setting. Nestled between large homes and century-old maple trees on a small peninsula on the North Shore of Long Island, the Centerport United Methodist Church (CUMC) building stands on a hill, in the middle of a residential neighborhood. In fact, the only commercial establishments on this peninsula are the Vanderbilt Museum/Planetarium, Centerport Beach, the Centerport Yacht Club, and our church building. Route 25a is a half-mile south, leading to the town of Huntington to our west, and the village of Northport to our east. According to census data from 2016, Centerport itself has approximately 5,300 people. Our hamlet is 96% “white;” no other racial identity groupings make up more than 1%. The average annual household income is well over \$100K.<sup>21</sup> Many people in our community have lived in this area their whole life, perhaps leaving for college, only to come right back after graduation. They purchased homes on their childhood streets or even their parents’ homes. Residents tell me, “This is the best (in some cases “the only”) place to live,” a “paradise on Earth.”

Our congregation has many lawyers, doctors, professors and teachers, executives, and business owners. I looked forward to serving with so many gifted people. For once, I thought, I would become a “leader among leaders,” sliding into a well-oiled leadership team. But that was not entirely the case. Six years ago, I would describe the leadership of CUMC as primarily pastor-led. Leadership was left mainly up to me. For some, there was a sense that I had the “direct line” to God. God would tell me what needed to be done and the people would do what they could to make it happen. Six years ago, there were a few parishioners who led prayer meetings and one couple who led a Bible Study. For the most part, the congregation looked to me for spiritual and practical leadership. When I talked with parishioners about the Call of all Christians and the Priesthood of all Believers, I heard the same responses over and over. Many who led in their offices, their schools, and

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<sup>21</sup> U. S. Bureau of the Census, “Quick Facts, Centerport, NY 2017 Estimate,” accessed August 7, 2018, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/centerportcdpnewyork,huntingtontownsuffolkcountynewyork/PST045217>.

other settings, wanted to come to church get away from all the responsibilities they had in the world. They were not interested in leading at church. They were looking for peace, for rest, for an escape from their hectic lives. No discussing politics or problems in the world. They wanted to know they were loved, and that Jesus would fill and heal their weary souls. The church was full of serving saints who would participate in mission and help others. Yet, there was a major emphasis on individual discipleship, to improve their own spiritual life, their own chance at personal salvation. The idea of “communal salvation” had not been offered or explained to them. The work outside the walls of the church continued to be almost entirely charitable in nature.

After several months of listening and learning, I began to learn more of the problems we faced. Several staff members would need to be replaced, some ministries using our church building would need to leave, while others would need to be encouraged to stay. Our own CUMC preschool needed a complete overhaul or to be terminated for the church to continue to survive financially. Getting our own house in order was the priority. Loving in new ways outside the walls would have to wait. These and many more complexities faced us. I needed help.

When I first arrived, effective leadership was only occurring in Bible Study, Mission, and Membership. Many other ministries of the church had leadership and teams that existed only on paper. Our building was in the middle of a complete renovation, with wires hanging from the ceiling. The main hallway that led to the classrooms, the kitchen, and the fellowship hall was blocked to prevent anyone from getting injured from the construction debris. During a Doctor of Ministry class lecture, Dr. Terry Todd paraphrased a quote from Benjamin Barber that still rings in my head. “We are living in a world that is simultaneously coming together and falling apart. I feel like I am running forward, looking over my shoulder and everything is crumbling behind me. There is a feeling of acceleration through time. Our communities are caught up in these times of changes.”<sup>22</sup> Six years ago, that is exactly how I felt - alone - with the church crumbling all around me, even with the completion of the \$400K renovation three months after my arrival, designed to strengthen the structure and improve the aesthetics of the building.

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<sup>22</sup> Professor Terry Todd, paraphrasing a quote from Benjamin Barber, (lecture, Drew University, Madison, NJ, August 1, 2018).

In preparation for my first Charge Conference meeting at CUMC, the leaders ranked various ministries of the church in order of importance to them. The list they developed is as follows: Administration, Preaching, Teaching, Visitation, Justice Ministries, Community Involvement, Ecumenism. To me, this looked “out of order.” Taking active stands on issues like immigration rights, equality, inclusion, and hate crimes, as well as working with the community and other houses of worship, were listed last, while ministries that benefited the people already inside our church were listed first. As I listened in small groups to their understandings of leadership, I heard parishioners describe my role as “Shepherd,” “Counselor,” “Teacher,” “CEO.” I was the preacher, the expert on Scripture, the prayer leader, etc. I again shared my thoughts on the call of all people, reminding them that everyone has gifts, and that I have only a few. It was apparent they did not agree, or they thought more of me regardless of what I said.

### **Lay Leadership and Community Outreach**

I was given a lot of power very early on to lead the church. Yet I was leading the effort – in other words, coming up with most of the strategies myself. I worried that I was managing too much by helping to save the church from further financial difficulty and several other problems. Did I make it too easy to maintain the status quo, so easy that *we* shied away from the difficult justice work needed? Was I hiding as a pastoral leader in the work of administration and avoiding what might be the more difficult work God calls us to?

Fortunately, there were a handful of leaders who were interested in developing their gifts, growing and sharing their faith, *and* reaching out to the community. They, along with me, believed in the Body of Christ, that they were called to lead together with me. As I met with them, I began to think about their ministry prioritization, the highest-ranked being the work of administration. This call may be described as balancing budgets, filling out paperwork correctly and on-time, and communicating well through various written and oral methods. But over time, I began to look at the tasks of administration in a very different light. I wanted to expand the work to include this important ministry in many other facets, such as equipping the saints for leadership, helping people discover their gifts and learning how to respond in new ways to God’s call. Furthermore, the content of what I preached and taught needed to equip leaders with

much more than just instructions on how to lead a team. I needed to explain the theological importance of acting in love, including the work of justice and inclusion.

One of the first questions I asked when I came to CUMC was their understanding of the front sign. It reads, “All Welcome.” Initially, we were excellent at welcoming everyone into our worship space. But after that initial visit, I noted that we spent more time with the people that were “like us.” Reaching out to different people and welcoming them, helping them to realize that they *are* an important part of the Body of Christ, was too limited in scope. I believe in Matthew 25, Jesus defined his Body as those who lived on the margins, the hungry, the thirsty, those who were sick or imprisoned, those in need of clothing. Of course these phrases and groups can be defined taking these classifications literally, metaphorically, or spiritually. I believe Jesus meant them in every way. All people, especially those living on the margins are *already* a part of the Body of Christ. They just don’t know it yet. Perhaps we have not made them feel welcome yet. Our understanding of the Body of Christ was too limited. There were people we just did not see.

### **Defining the Body of Christ Anew**

In society, there are whole “classes” of people that remain *invisible*, such as the homeless, the poor, the elderly, those with disabilities, racial and ethnic minorities, and the LGBTQ community. The list goes on and on. In my own church and community, there are very few visible persons who fit these categories I’ve described. I believe that all people are created in God’s image and that all people are of sacred worth. My question as pastoral leader became: what are we doing specifically to participate in helping to change lives for the better?

My question became stronger after the Pulse Night Club shootings. Two of my colleagues and I organized a service held at CUMC to stand against this hate crime. The sanctuary was packed with over 250 attending. It was a powerful service with witness and music that brought many to tears. There were healing prayers offered. Long, supportive conversations began immediately following the benediction. This service felt more like “church” than many other worship services I have led. However, only six of those in attendance were from my congregation. The next week, I asked several parishioners why they did not come. As I reflected on the many reasons offered, I began

to wonder if these reasons, while convenient, were not the main reasons for missing the service. Perhaps the issue is one of the tensions mentioned earlier in this chapter that echoes across this nation. How then does the church, how do I as pastor, begin to address the tension and begin to offer opportunity beyond division?

For decades, our church has participated in serving the homeless in New York City through Midnight Run, as well as in the greater Huntington area through HHI (Huntington Interfaith Homeless Initiative). Every night from December through March, houses of worship and other organizations sponsor 15-25 homeless (usually men) to keep them safe and out of the cold. Up until my first year, CUMC participated in feeding, clothing, and supporting this effort, but never housed the homeless in the church building. We would travel to another church to support the ministry there. The explanation was that our preschool would not allow it. When I asked if we could look again at housing them in our own church, I was told by one parishioner, “Pastor, we already do so much for *them*.” This one statement spoke volumes to me. This separation language, coming from our place of privilege, stopped me. If we, as a church, value all life and all human beings, why do we continue to speak using labels such as “us” and “them?” Why do we stop at certain actions that only alleviate struggles for such a brief time? If Christ *stands with, and is*, the marginalized, then how do our actions line up with this theology? How can we continue to live a life where some are very, very comfortable while so many are struggling and oppressed? Our church was willing to participate in “charity work,” but not yet ready to participate in structural, systemic change because, I believe, we were complacent.

This complacency would have been easy for me to let continue. There is always so much to do in this size church, and we have had many internal issues and systems to “clean up.” It was at this point that I noticed in my heart the call to follow Jesus and help others experience “abundant life” as described in John 10:10 had become very strong. After ignoring this call for so long, I had to face that my own complacency and that of the church was not only unethical, it was damaging to the Body and Soul of Christ and all of us. My question became: how do we help and how do we learn to overcome fear and anxiety? As I struggled with how to move forward, I began to consider the effects of white privilege.

## Understanding White Privilege

White privilege is very strong in our community. Crimes reported do not get listed as statistics, banks work their bias into lending practices, and police are called when anyone “suspicious looking,” drives through town. Carol Anderson presents the notion of *White Rage* against blacks, stating “it is not about visible violence, but rather it works its way through the courts, the legislatures, and a range of government bureaucracies.”<sup>23</sup> Anderson asks a question: Is there no limit to how far *White Rage* works to suppress?

Kate Braestrup, a community minister and law enforcement chaplain, once struggled with praying for a shooter who had killed his family and then himself. Reflecting on her hesitation to pray, she asked a question: “Have we found the threshold at which love stops?”<sup>24</sup> Six years ago, I could have asked the same question of our congregation. Had we reached our limit for loving people? Is this all our ministry was going to be, deepening ourselves and sending checks and material goods to those in need?

There are many millions of people suffering in this nation; countless more across the world. Families with no home; children with no food, elderly living with too little income to survive on their own. Many others struggle to finance homes, qualify for credit, or get access to affordable health care. Cathy O’Neil explains the injustice of many algorithms that rule the decisions by institutions. In *Weapons of Math Destruction*, she writes that “many models encode human prejudice, misunderstanding, and bias into their systems...their workings invisible to all but the highest priests in their domain...their verdicts, even when wrong or harmful, (are) beyond dispute or appeal...they tend to punish the poor and the oppressed in our society.”<sup>25</sup>

On Long Island, as elsewhere, those hardest hit by these biased algorithms are people of color. They suffer the systemic injustices embedded in our society, while so many at CUMC continue to enjoy benefits of privilege - yachts, nice cars, vacation homes, and full access to medical and mental health care, to name a few. Six years ago,

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<sup>23</sup> Carol Anderson, *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide* (New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2017), 3.

<sup>24</sup> Kate Braestrup, *The Blessing*, <https://themoth.org/stories/the-blessing>.

<sup>25</sup> Cathy O’Neil, *Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy* (New York: Crown Publishing, 2016), 3.

people suffering injustice needed us. Yet we did nothing. I did not lead enough or challenge the status quo enough to move the congregation to respond. I walked the line, taking the easier path, preaching about Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. I was complacent.

There is a song by the famous artist George Michael, called *Praying for Time*.<sup>26</sup> The lyrics speak to me about people of privilege and the way we lead our lives. Although the song emphasizes that we need to pray for more time to “get it right” as a privileged society, this song is much more. It is a call to action, to fight complacency, and to learn the fullness of love. I disagree with the lyrics in part. I do not believe it is God who “turned his back” on us. I believe we have turned our backs on our brothers and sisters in need. But for the most part, this song reflects, at least in some respects, the state of our nation as well as the North Shore. The writer is saying that we need to work for what is right for all, not to worry only about ourselves. For those who already have a great deal, complaining that we will lose something is not an option. Lives depend on sharing. God is calling us to love, to help one another, to share hope and help make abundant life a reality for all.

In *United Against Racism*, the words of Walker and Dorhauer hit hard, “It matters that we have been complicit by our silence and weakest of actions.”<sup>27</sup> But as the song states, is praying all we can and should do? We have a “call to an authentic Christianity, a religion that strives to become God’s inclusive, beloved community. It summons Christians to pray, think, and act to end racism.”<sup>28</sup> I partner this quote with the question the prophet Micah poses. “What does the Lord require of you? But to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.”<sup>29</sup> To do justice. Six years ago, I knew our church needed to focus more energy and resources toward justice work. I wondered specifically, what must we do, what must I do? What are our first steps?

I entered the Doctor of Ministry program looking for guidance, looking for tools to help me learn and grow. I also hoped to find ways to better lead my congregation, people just like me, who needed to do more. A big part of this was on me. I had not worked with them. I had not asked the right questions. I had not discussed these difficult

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<sup>26</sup> George Michael, *Praying for Time*, Columbia Records, 1990. See Appendix 2 for the full lyrics.

<sup>27</sup> National Council of Churches, *United Against Racism* (New York: Friendship Press, 2018), 3.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>29</sup> Micah 6:8 (ESV).

topics in a way that would challenge yet inspire people to listen and connect. I had not led. Throughout this program, through the readings, the discussions, the lectures, and the conferences, I realized that to work for change, I needed to begin by listening to my own community. I needed to better understand why no one else was already pushing me. What is holding me, holding us back? By answering these questions, I hoped to shift our ministry and leadership to make a difference, so others could experience abundant life.

### **The Project**

Although I have only mentioned a few of the problems our society faces, these injustices create much of the inequity, oppression, and discord in our nation today. Privilege and power work hand in hand. A dominant group holds power and sets the rules, giving the dominant group privilege. As I have become more aware of the inequities in our systems, I have become outraged at the harm that has been caused to so many. And I now realize that one of the reasons these problems persist is complacency. According to the Merriam Webster Dictionary, complacency is defined as “self-satisfaction especially when accompanied by unawareness of actual dangers or deficiencies.”<sup>30</sup> The privilege I have been given, has been crushing countless millions around me in an endless number of ways. And it is very easy to “let this be.” In the past, I have had thoughts such as, “Why is there a need for me to do something? Things are pretty good from where I stand. If others are struggling, I can vote for their cause, but I have enough of my own problems to confront. Why take on more?”

In the Fall of 2017, as I was reading scripture one morning, I came across the passage in John 10:10, where Jesus said, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”<sup>31</sup> In that moment, I heard Jesus speaking in a new way. Abundant Life<sup>32</sup> is

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<sup>30</sup> *Webster’s Dictionary of English Usage*, Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, 1989, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/complacency>.

<sup>31</sup> John 10:10 (NRSV).

<sup>32</sup> The Greek word translated as “abundantly” is *perissos* (περισσός) suggests the idea of excess (in number, measure, or rank) but can also mean superior, surpassing, extraordinary or uncommon. For more on this rich term, see <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G4053&t=RSV>. See also Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 6:61-62; and William F. Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, revised and ed. Frederick William Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. “περισσός.”

meant for everyone; life is as full as possible, both here on Earth, and in the life to come. It encompasses every facet of living. As a Christian, my faith is that God calls us to draw near to God, and offers us eternal salvation, through Christ. But God also calls us to live in a way that brings life here on Earth, not only to ourselves, but to all of God's children.

Today, I believe that many white men feel they are facing an "identity crisis." With the rapidly changing social, political, and racial landscape of our society, long-standing issues such as immigration, environmental justice, equality, legal support, economic opportunity, education, have even more importance. With the increase of women in leadership and growing numbers of people with different ethnicities speaking out, demanding to be heard, I believe the "power" white men have in the U.S. is being challenged.

In this Doctor of Ministry project, I listened with white men who live here on the North Shore of Long Island. I heard their understanding of what *abundant life* means. And I heard answers to the questions I had from the beginning: Are there practical components to abundant life? Do we have any responsibility to offer abundant life to anyone? If so, who? As we explore the injustices surrounding racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism in our society, do we have a responsibility to help, to act?

Diane Goodman provides perspective on this process. She analyzes the importance of finding the *motivation* for anyone from a privileged group to engage in social justice, offering three main motivating factors: *empathy, moral and spiritual values, and self-interest*. "By better understanding and analyzing the thinking and motivation of particular individuals...we can more intentionally include activities and arguments that target these different sources of motivation...enhancing our educational effectiveness."<sup>33</sup>

Through reflexive listening, I discovered more regarding what it means to be a white man in our community today and the challenges these men face by learning the struggles, fears, and questions white men have about their future. I also discovered common motivating factors that have led some white men in this context to work for opportunity and life-giving ministries. Through deep listening and engagement with the

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<sup>33</sup> Diane J. Goodman, "Motivating People of Privileged Groups to Support Social Justice," *Teachers College Record* 102, no. 6 (December 2000): 1085.

pain and suffering of people from different communities and experiences, I learned that transformation might occur, possibly leading to engagement for the work of justice, opportunity, and equality for all.<sup>34</sup> Through deep listening and identifying these motivating factors, I would like to help others to do the same, leading to new possibilities for more people in our surrounding communities.

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<sup>34</sup> See definitions provided in Appendix 3.

## CHAPTER 2

### NARRATIVE OF CONCERN

In this chapter, I begin with and then move to discuss, and finally define what I consider to be systemic injustices that affect abundant life for so many – racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism. As a white man of privilege, I weave in my own story of struggle and awakening with these societal ills that are so deeply embedded in our community, the wider church, and our culture. There may be no quick resolution to these problems, but there is always the ongoing call of God leading us toward abundant life for all.

Through the United Methodist Church (UMC), numbering 12.7 million members worldwide and almost 7 million members in the U.S.,<sup>35</sup> I believe the emphasis of personal and social holiness provides a faith of freedom, equality, and opportunity for all to express their individual belief. But how has that played out not only in society, but in the UMC? Given my project goal and the particularity of using the theme of abundant life, I have considered the following questions: Have we always followed the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels? Are we truly loving one another? Are we serving the least of these and seeing Christ by lifting each other, supporting each other, helping one another? How does the formation of American society play into these questions?

In September 2011, the Occupy Wall Street movement began in New York City, quickly spreading to other cities across the nation. This movement highlighted wider issues of inequality and power. Joerg Rieger discusses a new way to look at power that emerged in the Occupy movement.

Today, when we say power, the definition that comes to mind for many most often is top-down power: the power to control, the power to shape things, the power of the few, the power of the elected and the power of the self-appointed, the power of a corporation, and so on. The Occupy movement questioned these powers, but it also showed another way of power, and that's what I call bottom-up power. There weren't strong leaders in the movement. But there was an effort to

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<sup>35</sup> United Methodist Church, "United Methodists at a Glance," [www.umc.org](http://www.umc.org), accessed March 28, 2019, <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/united-methodists-at-a-glance>.

shape power by way of consensus, to take a look at who had been excluded. Now, oftentimes the people who led the consensus gathering were of a certain privilege, but they made efforts to include people of other classes and they also attempted to be conscious of racial divides and gender issues. Occupy movements, although they were not perfect, tried to build on this bottom-up way of power.<sup>36</sup>

Reiger continues by pointing out that in the Gospel of Luke, we see Jesus resisting the way of top-down power, first from the temptation of the devil, who tries to give Jesus “the world,”<sup>37</sup> then by resisting the calls of humanity to claim it, as many pushed him at every turn. “His whole life and ministry was spent working with the people, building power from the bottom up. Theologically, I think this is the most interesting thing for us as people of faith. Could we imagine God in that way? That’s the question.”<sup>38</sup>

In our nation, “the civil religion, like any religion which becomes an established part of culture, is always in danger of sanctifying the virtues of a society while ignoring its vices.”<sup>39</sup> Those with less privilege are often overlooked. White affluent mainstream has control and continues to dominate the decision making of our society, making decisions that often lead to the benefit of those in power and to the detriment of anyone else. Harm is done, whether it is intentional or unintentional, and there seems to be a lack of awareness of the harm – oppression and injustice – that occurs from these decisions. Awareness is certainly needed – an education on the affects and plight of those who are not in control. Jesus blesses the poor, the meek, and those who experience oppression and injustice. Through awareness, perhaps there will be motivation to help make this blessing become a new reality.

In February 2019, as part of a trip to the Dominican Republic, our team worked at an orphanage to provide various structures for play and learning, as well as to witness the lives of the children in the poorest sections of the nation. We learned from the leaders of the orphanage that there is no effective adoption process for citizens within the country

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<sup>36</sup> Timothy McGee and Joerg Reiger, “Power, Economics, and Christian Faith from Below: An Interview with Joerg Rieger,” *The Other Journal: An Intersection of Theology and Culture*, <https://theotherjournal.com/2013/07/15/power-economics-and-christian-faith-from-below-an-interview-with-joerg-rieger/>.

<sup>37</sup> Matthew 4:8-10 (NRSV).

<sup>38</sup> McGee and Reiger.

<sup>39</sup> Conrad Cherry, ed., *God’s New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 17.

itself. Almost all adoptions go outside of the borders. Many of my parishioners and friends were surprised to hear that the DR had such poverty. When they think of the Dominican Republic, they think of Punta Cana and Santo Domingo with the resorts, beautiful beaches, and first-class amenities. They were not aware that just a few miles inland and all throughout the center of the country, there are whole villages where people live next to trash heaps taller than three-story buildings, suffering daily with serious breathing conditions and diseases due to the unsanitary conditions. Tragically, this is the only way these villagers can afford to live.

After I returned home and told the story, I was told by several parishioners and friends in New York that I should not travel to help other nations and that our church should not support this effort. “Many people suffer here in the U.S. and they should come first.” When I replied that most of our local church ministry in fact supports people on Long Island and in New York City, and that they were welcome to join us in the effort to help those here in our area, I was told by some that they were grateful for our ministry to help those nearby, but they were not able to serve at this time.

I believe that in general, the focus today is much more inward, becoming a detriment to our neighbors not only in our society, but around the world. Too often, the church has taught that every individual should follow scripture and the words of Jesus without providing a wider understanding of the message. I am concerned that the Church has been worried about attracting members to its version of the Truth and worried less about the message and teachings it was professing. By allowing its members to focus on individual faith and ignore our neighbors, the wider institution has not developed a satisfactory response to persecution and lack of inclusiveness. Too much of the time, I believe, like others, that the Church needs to learn it can “sustain more autonomy than it had thought, and religious individualists would have to learn that solitude without community is mere loneliness.”<sup>40</sup> The One Body of Christ must have all the parts working together in harmony and in a healthy way to flourish.<sup>41</sup>

As a Christian, I believe that we are called to spread the life-giving message of the Gospel of inclusivity, justice, and equality of opportunity in order to move from

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>41</sup> 1 Corinthians 12 (NRSV).

individualistic responses to the fullness of life as the purpose for all people. In John 10:10, Jesus gives the reason he came to Earth - to offer *abundant life*.<sup>42</sup> What does this mean? What does abundant life look like? Who is it for? Who is experiencing this life now? *Can we*, and at times *should we* be the “hands and feet” that provide abundant life? If so, how do we help to make it available? How do we help to make it *more* available? I ask these last questions in the context of my parish since, as I previously described, it is in an affluent community.

The North Shore of Nassau and Suffolk counties has been labeled the “Gold Coast” of the island, due to the vast wealth, large homes, yacht clubs, access to good education and health-care, and many other “benefits” living here brings. Society teaches us that we, on the North Shore, already have abundant life, countless opportunities that people from different communities do not. Material possessions and access to opportunity, education and health all communicate the “good life,” a “job well done.” But I believe there are important pieces missing in this description. This list does not include things like justice, sharing, caring, and compassion. And it certainly does not mention anything in depth about love.

What does “love” mean in connection, community, and the Body of Christ? Growing up, I was scarred from years of listening to so many around me consistently make derogatory remarks about anyone “different” from us. This changed me. I learned from my friends and family who was to be loved - people like us - and who was not - anyone different. I did not agree. Fear and confusion set in. But I silently “fell in line.” I did not want to make waves, become an outcast. As Wayne Oates states in *When Religion Gets Sick*, “the most conspicuous kind of growth-limiting community is the family itself.”<sup>43</sup> I developed a deeper, personal illness in my heart, that conflicted with who I really wanted to be. Call it a “heart illness,” but my mind was also conflicted. I could make a case that I had a “mind illness” too.

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<sup>42</sup> John 10:10 (NRSV). Throughout this Gospel, Jesus eludes to the reason he came to Earth, to show us a better way. Jesus offers us a fuller life, a life of relationship, rich in connection with God and with one another, a life filled with Joy. It is by following the life and teachings of Jesus, as presented in so many parables, acts, and moments of true servanthood, that life grows and the Body of Christ is strengthened.

<sup>43</sup> Wayne E. Oates, *When Religion Gets Sick* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1970), 184.

I graduated from high school, went off to college and learned a great deal about life. Years later, I served in a church as an active lay member. Then I answered the call to full-time ministry and studied at Drew – with all its diversity, gifts, and the experiences of so many. I now serve in the New York Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church (UMC) – the most diverse conference in our denomination. And I fully believe in a core position of the UMC, “All people are of sacred worth.”<sup>44</sup> I am all set. No more issues with love. Whew.

When I began my journey in the Doctor of Ministry program, I was confident that I knew what love was...or at least what love should be. I also thought I was good at modeling and teaching others what love *in public* should look like. I now realize I fall way too short of this mark.

The phrasing in Thomas Oord’s definitions of love challenged me (in a good, life-building way). In each definition, for *agape*, *eros*, and *philia*, are in shorthand the phrases, “intentional...promoting overall well-being.”<sup>45</sup> The “work of love” needs to be done “when facing harm or evil, affirming what is valuable, and cooperating with others.”<sup>46</sup> The “work” Oord is mentioning is required of Christians, supporting the work and mission of the church to bring love forth in the world, for all. Jesus gives us the Greatest Commandment, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind... and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”<sup>47</sup> Combining this text with Oord’s definition and phrasing, we must be *intentional about love, the work of the church, as it involves our opponents, others and ourselves, to promote overall well-being.*<sup>48</sup>

Reflecting on these definitions, I look back at my own life and ministry and see that I fall short. I have been very intentional about loving those right around me. But that’s just it; I have not been *intentionally* meeting enough people that are *different* from

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<sup>44</sup> United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* - 2016 (The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), Par. 4. Article 4.

<sup>45</sup> Thomas Jay Oord, *Defining Love: A Philosophical, Scientific and Theological Engagement* (Grand Rapids: Brazo Press, 2010), 43.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Matthew 22:37-39 (NRSV).

<sup>48</sup> Combining Oord’s definitions with the Greatest Commandment.

me. As a leader, as a Body of Christ, our call is to be intentional about loving more than just those on our own street.

This intentionality led me to the parable of the “Good Samaritan.”<sup>49</sup> Most often, I have looked at this story from the perspective of the three people who came upon the scene. At times, I have also looked at this scripture from the perspective of the victim laying on the road. As the coursework and classroom discussions for this program continue to deepen in my mind, I now look at this story more and more from the perspective of the robbers and attackers. Every moment of my life, in considering a new perspective, I benefit from white privilege, even white supremacy, that has the effect of “robbing and attacking” people of their dignity and of life itself. This effect leads back to the interpretation of abundant life.

Through examination of this passage, it is important to take the entire verse into account. Jesus said, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” I have thought a lot about the first part of this verse. In the context of the United States, one could make a case that whites have acted like thieves since the colonial era. When Europeans arrived, there were already people living in North America. The native people did not ask for the white settlers to come. Nor did they expect to have their land taken, their resources confiscated, and their lives sacrificed for the benefit of those who invaded. The slaves did not ask to be shackled, sold, and brought to America to become the property of the plantation owners. Women did not ask to be subservient to men, nor did they give permission for men to take their property and to vote on their behalf. The LGBTQ community did not ask to be treated like second-hand citizens, to be despised, and to have rights refused to them. I, as a white man of privilege, can be seen as the thief in this scripture, robbing others of their possessions, their possibilities, their opportunities, and any chance at equality. This “robbery” can lead those who suffer to experience spiritual distress, a lack of hope, and a distrust in faith. The dominating class, white men, holds power and tend to share it when they want to or when it is taken away from them.

As mentioned before, our society faces many problems that prevent whole segments of the population from justice, equality, and opportunities for a better life. I will

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<sup>49</sup> Luke 10:25-37 (CEV).

focus on four societal ills mentioned in chapter one - racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism – that prevent millions of people in our nation and on Long Island from experiencing abundant life.

### **Racism**

Although race may be an “artificial fabrication” that is developed differently in different societies, it defines people at every moment. Yet, no one is born with a color label attached to them. Defining one’s “color” can take on a different methodology and understanding in different places. The very same person can be considered “White,” “Black,” “Asian,” “Hispanic,” or some other agreed to category, depending on the region of the world. In fact, some people can simply fake accents and be mistaken for different “races.” Being classified in this way can do great harm to whole groups of people while providing great benefits to others.

Racism is taught and learned. The divisions caused by this injustice create serious problems. “Racism is a system of advantage based on race” and involves “cultural messages and institutional policies and practices as well as the beliefs and actions of individuals.”<sup>50</sup> A clarification needs to be made between prejudice and racism, terms that are often confused. Whereas prejudice is an individual, preconceived opinion, racism affects everyone simultaneously, but in different ways. Peggy McIntosh explains her personal understanding of racism: “I was taught to see racism only in individual acts of meanness, not in invisible systems conferring dominance on my group.”<sup>51</sup> Growing up, I was taught in a very similar fashion. However, racism is more than just an individual ideology. It is a whole system that affects every member of society. In the United States, this “system” provides whites with a significant advantage.

It is often difficult to separate racism from gender and social class inequalities. Those in power create “controlling images...to help justify the economic exploitation and social oppression”<sup>52</sup> of the subordinate group. These images can cause people to reject

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<sup>50</sup> For an extended discussion of this point, see D. Wellman, *Portraits of White Racism* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1977), Chapter 1.

<sup>51</sup> Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,” *Independent School* 49, no. 2 (1990): 33.

<sup>52</sup> Yen Le Espiritu, *Asian American Women and Men: Labor, Laws, and Love* (Alta Mira Press: New York, 2000), 98.

their own individual and group identity and accept in its stead “a white supremacist complex that establishes the primacy of Euro-American cultural practices and social institutions.”<sup>53</sup> The result has been a pervasive idea that being white can provide advantages. In fact, many people have gone to great lengths to be as white as possible.

Skin color plays a vital role in determining a person’s place in society. Richard Rodriguez explains how his mother would become quite upset with him when he tanned and got too dark. “Dark skin was for my mother the most important symbol of a life of oppressive labor and poverty.”<sup>54</sup> She equated darker skin with Los Braceros, “the poor, the pitiful, the powerless ones,” who worked for American farmers in the fields. She worried that her son would not get the opportunities he deserved if he was too dark. There are people who literally try to “wash off” the color of their skin by using brushes and detergent or many other means. The privileges whites receive drive people of color to take extraordinary measures to be more “white.” But complexion is only part of this image. There are many other behaviors and attributes commonly accepted and expected for someone to be considered white, such as more education, more wealth, remaining calm, and using less hand gestures. These are emphasized in our media and have become embedded in our beliefs and way of thinking as a society.

Much of the research and debate on racism has focused on the differences between “black” and “white” populations. “The current exclusively black-white framework for racism prevails throughout U.S. society, even when it is inappropriate.”<sup>55</sup> This polarization has left Asian/Pacific Islanders, Latinos, Native Americans, Arabs, and countless others out of the conversation. These groups have suffered immensely. For example, Native Americans were eliminated during the colonization period, with the remnant placed on reservations. Today, conditions for many of them are still terrible. They experience poverty and many problems related to being extremely poor at an alarming rate. There is no hope for the “American Dream.” Whole groups of people are being forgotten, ignored, abused, or worse.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Richard Rodriguez, *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (Dial Press: New York, 1982), 127.

<sup>55</sup> Elizabeth Sutherland Martinez, *De Colores Means All of Us: Latina Views for a Multi-Colored Century* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1998), 8.

In *Learning to Be White*, Thandeka<sup>56</sup> offers story after story of the conditioning and loss white children experience from parents and society as they learn a racist way of thinking. In one story, Frank was exposed to racism at five years old. His mother scolded him for putting a coin in his mouth that “niggers” kept “in their underwear.” Another story involved Mike, who at four years old, learned that interracial relationships are considered “unacceptable.” Any person of color must have the worst diseases in the world according to his parents. Whites cannot afford to be contaminated. Thandeka describes these parents as experiencing “*white shame*, a deeply private feeling of not being at home within one’s home community.”<sup>57</sup> She explains that Euro-Americans are not conscious that being white is part of their identity. This white identity development involves disconnecting from our inherent thoughts and beliefs, from our original sense of our self, in order to not lose the love, respect and acceptance of those upon whom we rely—our parents, teachers, faith community leaders—to meet our basic needs and care for us. Thandeka describes shame as an “emotional display of a hidden civil war” working to suppress feelings of empathy to conform to societal expectations.

The child and then the adult learn how to suppress such risky feelings of camaraderie with persons beyond the community’s racial pale in order to decrease the possibility of being exiled from their own community. And added to the loss of these feelings [of camaraderie] is the loss of self-respect resulting from discarding them.<sup>58</sup>

Thandeka goes on to discuss the difficulty that arises when we begin to call out whiteness as adults—when we are asked to accept and acknowledge our white racial identity: “It reveals the differences within the child that it had to deny in order to become congruent with its own caretaking environment. The induction process of the Euro-American child into whiteness is costly. The child must begin to separate itself from its own feelings.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Thandeka, *Learning to Be White: Money, Race, and God in America* (Continuum: New York, 2000).

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 13. Thandeka’s definition stems from the thinking of Gordon Allport in *The Nature of Prejudice* (New York: Perseus Books, 1954).

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 19. See also Alice Miller, *Prisoners of Childhood: The Drama of the Gifted Child and the Search for the True Self* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

This separation of ourselves from our feelings has caused us to *disremember*. Eddie Glaude Jr. explains that “disremembering is active forgetting.”<sup>60</sup> It is intentional, perhaps only at first, but then becomes habitual. Somewhere along the line, forgetting becomes an option. In our current world, we have so many devices to remember for us, on our behalf. We don't even have to try to remember, correctly or otherwise, and we don't consider that what we record is also shaped by our own hermeneutics. Glaude discusses this further, challenging the lack of awareness of white people to the embedded discrimination in society. “We simply had to be better people. I want no part of that story. It blinds us to how the value gap has been so fundamental to who we are as a nation.”<sup>61</sup> This lack of honestly seeing the continued injustice and the plight of others seems related to the disconnection of feelings as Thandeka describes. There is a resistance to accept any responsibility for the injustices so many people face every day. Theories are developed that individualize the problems, which also seems like the ultimate expression of the sin of human pride, and when pride and fear become entangled, they tend to cast out love. “The primary purpose of disremembering is to hide from view the *value gap* and to protect our national innocence; to keep the ugliness of our deeds at arm’s length or buried deep in our national subconscious.”<sup>62</sup>

One of my ancestors was named Matthew Grubbs. He started a farm in Loudoun County, Virginia, in the 1800s. Cherokees lived nearby and a “land dispute” began. To resolve the issue, the Cherokees offered Matthew a different piece of land not too far away. As a peace offering, Matthew was given the chief’s daughter, who became known as “Rebecca.” My family still has her beautiful headdress along with many stories from their past. Listening to these stories, I always wondered if this “resolution” worked out. I wondered if Rebecca embraced this decision. Immediately, she had to leave her tribe, her family, her life as she knew it, and begin to live in white society. My immediate family didn’t know any more about her, but to this day, I wonder what life must have been like for her. This led me later in life to dive deeper into the Native American experience. What I discovered was almost polar-opposite of what I had been taught.

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<sup>60</sup> Eddie Glaude, Jr., *Democracy in Black: How Race Still Enslaves the American Soul* (New York: Broadway Books, 2017), 47.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 39.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 49.

In elementary school, we learned the “standard history” of settling this land and coming up against the “savages.” Very little was taught in a way that pointed any blame towards white immigrants. Every battle described was tilted to begin with some fault of the tribes. But in seminary, I learned something very different. Researching and writing about the “Trail of Tears,” I became aware of how European Americans came to this land uninvited. They stole, murdered, and marched countless people in horrible weather and in inhumane conditions to a land that was “less meaningful,” with countless thousands dying along the way.

The Dakota Access Pipeline protest is a modern-day cry for visibility, dignity, and rights for the Native Americans that have been pushed aside for so long. Of course, the pipeline track was moved away from the mostly white capital city of Bismarck to the “empty land” of the tribes who live near Standing Rock. The mentality seemed to be, *I will support this pipeline, so long as any issues that arise with the pipeline will not be in my own backyard*. This thinking continues the injustice that has been going on for centuries. Taking without asking; letting others assume the risk for our benefit. For the Natives, who value land so much, we have yet to ask permission to meet, live, and prosper *on their land*. We continue to enjoy and exploit the land and the resources we have taken, without a thought as to how they were “obtained.”

In April 2018, I attended the Revolutionary Love Conference at Middle Church in New York City. This was a transformative experience for me. I listened to scholars and activists and learned so much about the need for a new kind of love in our families, in our churches, and in our communities. One session was led by Mark Charles and Brian McLaren on “Our History and The Violence of White Supremacy.”<sup>63</sup> The lecture focused on significant pieces of history that allowed white supremacy to grow and embed in the fabric of our society. “Savages, 3/5 human, etc. Our own Constitution, and other governing laws, were written in a way that allows for white supremacy to continue, even grow.” Mark reviewed excerpts of speeches, letters, and laws where President Lincoln, in effect, created the “pipeline to prison” for people of color. As Mark stated in his lecture, “the system is not broken. It is working exactly as it was designed.” What a show-

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<sup>63</sup> Mark Charles and Rev. Dr. Brian McLaren, presentation “*Our History and The Violence of White Supremacy*” at the Revolutionary Love Conference, Middle Collegiate Church, NY, April 7, 2018.

stopping moment for me. How can this be? We have been taught lies? We have disremembered and turned our eyes from the white supremacy working in our midst. What should freedom look like, and who should be free? Our own families were immigrants, seeking a better way of life. Why do we stand opposed to anyone else seeking the same benefits? As Mark stated, we *all* need to intentionally create a new understanding and definition of “We the People.”

This was echoed in other sessions at the conference, including one led by Traci Blackmon on the movement of Black Women standing up to the evils of racism and sexism. She called for the destruction of the “theology of chosen-ness” – a theology that values who God loves most. She discussed the plight of the slave woman and the way they dealt with their harsh reality. “As black women breastfed and loved the children of their white masters, their children were being sold...but black women did not allow hatred to consume us...our Dream is that we will all be One...hatred will not, will NOT have the last word.”<sup>64</sup> With all society and its systems have done to divide, discard, and dehumanize millions of people of all races, colors, and ethnicities throughout our history, it is a blessing, even a miracle, that those facing institutional oppression still want to work together with those “in power” to build something better. Dr. Blackmon stated, “we must see one another...acknowledge the Divinity in all of us.”<sup>65</sup> When we do this, our hearts change. We begin to value each other more in the way of God.

To “see one another,” to “acknowledge the Divinity” in another person, I believe takes intentionality and focus. We must want to listen and take the time to see a person, as God sees them. As we encounter, as we listen to their stories, experiences, struggles and joys, we get to know another person. We see them with new eyes. But if we do not take this time, if we do not answer that call from God to listen, we may never experience parts of the abundant life God so desperately wants for all of us.

In our hectic, overscheduled lives, we often miss the opportunity to listen. The distractions of this world and the lure of our own egos cause us to stray, pulling us away from God’s will. John Neafsey discusses the importance of listening for the *still, small*

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<sup>64</sup> Rev. Dr. Traci Blackmon presentation “Moral Courage: Black Women Facing Down Racism” at the Revolutionary Love Conference, Middle Collegiate Church, NY, April 6, 2018.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

*voice of God*. This voice does not always come as a thunderous sound interrupting our daily routines, forcing us to pay attention. Instead, it often comes in a “quieter, softer, even subtler tone that we may miss if we do not listen, if we do not pay attention, or if we pay attention to something else.... [W]e must learn to listen in a discerning way, and in the right places, for the mysterious whispering of the Spirit.”<sup>66</sup>

But we cannot do this important work of listening only on our peninsula. It is important to continue to encounter new people, to “acknowledge the Divinity” in all people as Blackmon states, to travel and learn the lives and experiences of others. This work of listening will help us to *remember*, to see each other as God sees us, leading us to risk and stand up for others, to work with our brothers and sisters to free them from systems of oppression and injustice.

As the Israelites groaned after 400 years of slavery, their cries were heard by God. It is more than noteworthy that God responded to the cries of the Israelites through a human being, Moses.

Then the Lord said, “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.”<sup>67</sup>

Moses had a great deal of fear with this call from God. He felt unworthy and offered God many reasons why he was not qualified to take on the task. But as Moses listened to God, he began to trust and rose to the challenge. God called this one individual to do something extraordinary. In the end, Moses overcame his fear and helped to free the Israelites, his own people, from centuries of captivity.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus called people to follow him. Many listened to him and decided to follow; some did not. Jesus focused a great deal of his ministry on the poor, showing those listening, through parables, sermons, and through his actions, that he not only stood with the poor, but that his Spirit, he himself, *is* the poor. In the Gospel of

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<sup>66</sup> John Neafsey, *A Sacred Voice Is Calling: Personal Vocation and Social Conscience* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2006), 31.

<sup>67</sup> Exodus 3:7-10 (NRSV).

Matthew, we hear Jesus saying, “Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you do it to me.”<sup>68</sup> Jesus wants us to see people like he does. The call of all Christians is to serve those in need, wherever they may be.

Paul Farmer is a doctor from the United States who has spent his life caring for the poor in the U.S. and in Haiti. He writes about the widespread inability of the privileged to see and hear the poor:

The voices, the faces, the suffering of the sick and the poor are all around us. Can we see and hear them? Well-defended against troubling incursions of doubt, we the privileged are precisely the people most at risk of remaining oblivious, since this kind of suffering is not central to our own experience.<sup>69</sup>

If we are following God’s will, then ignoring the poor because of our fears is not an option. In 2009, I was invited to go to Haiti for the first time. At first, I wanted to decline the invitation, as I had many fears: being detained by airport security, my lack of fluency in their language that could lead to unintentionally saying something offensive or ignorant, and overlaying ways to “fix” their situation out of empathy without taking the time to listen. In addition, meeting very different people in a very different place can bring on anxiety. For me this anxiety was (and at times still is) almost debilitating. But I knew that to learn and experience something new, I needed to overcome my fears, trusting that it would work out. Being afraid isn’t the problem; letting fear stop you from encountering someone new is. I am so thankful I was able to push through my fears. On this trip, my eyes were opened to a new definition of poor.

We traveled to a village called Furcy, about 15 miles south of Port-Au-Prince in the mountains of Haiti. It is a beautiful landscape, although the vegetation is just returning after the nationwide deforestation by the government. In the United States, I have served with homeless people. I have been to places that are very poor, by our nation’s standards. I have served those in need. But there is something entirely different when you see a family of ten living in a one room hut, sleeping on a dirt floor, with no electricity, no running water (or clean water for that matter), and little to no food. As we visited and learned from the local villagers in Furcy, we learned that the family, on a

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<sup>68</sup> Matthew 25:40 (NRSV).

<sup>69</sup> Paul Farmer, *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 176.

good day, would eat one meal. Often, they would go two or three days with just one meal. The people of the village looked very thin, even malnourished. At that time, there was no school anywhere in the area and no medical clinic or services in their village. They had just survived a hurricane season that destroyed the farms they planted on the hillsides to survive. No one seemed to care. In City Soleil, the poorest section of Port-Au-Prince, the situation is even more dire. Starving children stand naked in the trash with sewage flowing through the streets. Drinking water is only available from the trucks that drive in every single day, keeping the residents alive. It looked like a war zone. In some ways, these places on Earth are *our war zones* - places we see on the news, places we hear about through advertisements and try to forget.

The people in Haiti are the poorest in the Western Hemisphere. Day in and day out, they struggle to survive. Yet with all the hardships they face, with all the obstacles in their way, with all the sadness, loss, and hopelessness their situations would seem to bring, these beautiful children of God not only worship for hours each week, they live with hope. They live with love in their heart. They are all too ready to welcome anyone with open arms. They welcomed us like they had always known us, like we were relatives that went missing and now returned, longing for others to develop relationships with them. They want to be seen, not to be considered as the “other.” And they want us to listen.

The mission I am a part of, Mountains of Hope for Haiti,<sup>70</sup> was established in 2004 to help the people of Furcy, a town about thirty miles south of Port-Au-Prince in the surrounding mountains. This town had been nearly obliterated by severe hunger, storms, and lack of medical care. As the leaders of our mission listened to the people, they developed a plan to help the people based on their needs and desires. Over the course of the last fifteen years, our teams have built a church, a clinic, a school, and sponsored training for self-sustaining employment in farming, sewing, and other opportunities. We provide scholarships for education and feeding programs at the school. “At Mountains of Hope, we:

- Affirm the sacred dignity and worth of every human being

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<sup>70</sup> Mountains of Hope for Haiti, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.mountainsofhopeforhaiti.org/mission>.

- Believe that all people have a God-given right to sufficient food, water, shelter and medical care and opportunities for education and self-sustaining employment
- Believe that a sustained presence, and relationship, in a community is the most effective means of enacting effective change and developing a more sustainable presence and future for that community
- Do not so much “do” for others, but help provide the basic necessities and tools by which others can “do” for themselves.”<sup>71</sup>

Listening to those in need and helping them in ways that are life-building and life-affirming are the best ways to allow abundant life to grow. Giving others the tools they need to build and prosper on their own is a beautiful way for life to be fulfilled, to share love and allow others to feel loved.

As a Christian, I believe that God is Love. God calls all Christians to love God and love one another. God gives further clarification to our call in Micah 6:6-8. “What does the Lord require of you? But to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.”<sup>72</sup> If we are *required* by God to love others and to do justice, the church *must* be a place that welcomes all, actively reaching out to connect, serve, and lift up in love. Without acts of justice, our love becomes a “noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.”<sup>73</sup>

I was introduced to a quote from Dr. Cornel West providing a clear definition of love that is well known in theological circles. “Justice is what love looks like in public.”<sup>74</sup> Expanding this definition, we do not only want to love others *in private*, we need to love others in ways that the whole world can see. Sometimes, this kind of love can be difficult, especially when we feel pressure to conform. The people in our lives that we respect, who have authority over us, have great impact in the way we view and act in the world. The concept of shame, as Thandeka outlines, can be so powerful, it can cause empathetic people to stay silent during times of great injustice.

When I was sixteen years old, my friends and I were asked to be leaders for a special Vacation Bible School (VBS) week at church. This would be an additional week

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Micah 6:8 (ESV).

<sup>73</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:1 (NRSV).

<sup>74</sup> This quote was shared during a lecture in Revolutionary Love class on April 22, 2018 Drew University, Madison, NJ). Credit given to Dr. Cornel West, professor of African American Studies and Religion at Princeton University.

in the summer from our annual event, serving Hispanic children from a town several miles from ours. We accepted the invitation and spent a great deal of time preparing the lessons and activities. One day, we all went to the Chicago Zoo, about 30 miles from our church. The theme planned for that day was “Celebrating All of God’s Creation.” Several cars and vans transported everyone to the city. We had many children in our large van. As we traveled, we learned that none of them had ever been to Chicago; many had never been outside their own community. Driving through the city, their little faces and hands pressed up against the windows to see the tall buildings that make up the skyline. They were so excited.

It was a great day; the kids had a wonderful time. As we made our way back to the church, each child thanked us. I remember my heart was filled. As the children boarded the bus that would take them back to their town, we got in our van to go home, a short five-minute ride. Immediately after shutting the doors, my friends began to yell and complain about the “taco stains” from the children’s fingerprints on the windows. Painful, derogatory comments were made that still make me sad and angry to this day. These friends were like family to me. If we truly believe that all people are our brothers and sisters, how could anyone think this way, *especially* at a church event celebrating all of God’s creation? I could not believe what I was hearing, unable to reconcile my understanding of love with their words and actions. *Yet I remained silent.*

Silence, particularly as it relates to injustice, can not only be divisive, it can be deadly. Our nation has seen the effects of silence from too many people for far too long. We are plagued with many problems - poverty, lack of good education for all, environmental waste and disaster, and the lack of health care for many. The list goes on and on. People are suffering. Lives are limited, if not cut short due at least in large part to the effects of the collective choices we make. Over time, it seems one segment of our population, in large part, continues to remain silent, virtually invisible, in the work to change these injustices: white men.

I am not claiming that all white men are silent. The problem is that *not enough* white men are engaging, being vocal, stepping out to work for change. Many are working hard for change right now. I have hundreds of white male colleagues, parishioners, friends, and acquaintances that are doing great work for justice, peace, and the rights for

all people, leading from their heart and not just their head. I have friends all around the nation that tell me white men in their communities are working hard for change. I see marches on television, read articles in the paper, and listen to my colleagues at Drew who tell me there are many white men supporting justice ministries and initiatives. Yet, too many remain silent. I believe that many men in wealthy, white communities are to some extent, aware of the issues and the consequences but are not moved to action. I would like to learn why. I suspect there may be reasons for complicity that do not involve a lack of empathy or care for others. In my own experience, there were conditions that led to my own transformation and continued desire to learn more and work for change. If these conditions had not occurred, I most likely would not be in this program writing about this topic. This project emerges as a means to discover the reasons for inaction.

### **Classism**

As I mentioned in chapter one, white privilege is very strong in our community. Biased lending practices, greatly skewed school resource allocations, higher home prices, and greater access to health care are just some of the effects of classism along the North Shore of Long Island. As many of us are born into this privilege, living with it our whole lives, often makes it very difficult to see these effects. Learning of these impacts and then taking the next step to work for change can be challenging for many in affluent areas.

The distribution of wealth in the United States today is terribly unequal. In 2016, the richest Americans, the top 1%, own over 40% of the financial assets in our country. Most of the rest of us (which makes up the bottom 90% of the population share in only 22% of the country's financial assets).<sup>75</sup> This gap has been widening over the last fifty years. The rich are getting richer while the rest of us are staying even or worse, getting poorer. The U.S. is known as the land of opportunity, a democratic society where those who work hard can take part in the American Dream. However, in reality, wealth is extremely lopsided. "Social class is a largely self-perpetuating category marked by persistent and pervasive inequalities of income, wealth, status, and social

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<sup>75</sup> See Appendix 4.

power...that...constitutes a form of oppression that is structural.”<sup>76</sup> The goal of corporations is to maximize shareholder wealth. To compete for funding from investors, businesses constantly strive to improve their bottom line. Generally, profits increase in one of two ways: increasing revenue or reducing costs. Revenue can increase by raising the price or selling more products or services. Efforts to reduce costs often involve paying workers less or working them harder to gain efficiencies, resulting in the exploitation of labor. Some capitalists use profits to support their own affluent lifestyles, to reinvest in their business to expropriate more profit, or to spend it to keep the entire system going (lobbying, campaign donations, lawyers, etc.) One way that companies have reduced labor costs is by replacing “white American labor” with immigrants. However, these “foreigners” have not been fully accepted into our society.

The United States is a nation of immigrants. Native Americans may be the only exception. The first European immigrants were illegal, uninvited invaders. The United States is what it is today in large part due to immigration and slavery. From the burdens of other peoples’ backs, some whites have enjoyed privilege. In fact, history has shown that just about every immigrant group has been suppressed on arrival. Each group from African American, to Asian American, to Hispanic, and others, that has been brought in or annexed, has been expected to ease the burden of the dominant group by working hard and submit to their “lower” position in society.

One example from the IBP (Iowa Beef Packers) takes this one step further. The recruiters for this meat packing organization have actively sought out undocumented immigrants for hire, in part, because they cannot push for fair labor practices as much as a citizen, since they fear being called out to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). The leaders of IBP advertise the opportunity for the position as a “stepping stone” to the American Dream. “If you are new to this country, you are not going to be a doctor right away. Instead, you need to take the jobs other Americans don’t want, work hard,

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<sup>76</sup> Maurianne Adams, “Introduction to Classism” in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice: An Anthology on Racism, Antisemitism, Sexism, Heterosexism, Ableism, and Classism*, eds. Maurianne Adams, Warren J. Blumenfeld, Rosie Castaneda, Heather W. Hackman, Madeline L. Peters, Ximena Zuniga (New York ; Routledge, 2000), 380.

and you may get ahead. You do it for your kids.”<sup>77</sup> Earning barely more than minimum wage with a turnover rate of over 80 percent makes it virtually impossible for these workers and their families to change their condition. They are stuck, as the “system” designed them to be. The rich bosses get richer. The workers stay poor, struggling to make ends meet, struggling just to survive.

Marc Cooper describes the story of Symery, a worker at IBP. After slashing his palm open on the job, Symery had to pay for treatment himself, since he was not eligible for medical benefits for another month. He was expected back to work right away and had a second accident with the same hand. He was left with a “crooked wrist” and could not perform his duties. However, the company reported him fit to work, making him ineligible for benefits. Symery had to go without income.

Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident. People in the lower income brackets in the U.S., particularly people of color, often do not receive the medical care, mental health care, and physical care they so desperately need. There is a common notion that poor people are inferior. They should “get an education, get a job, and take care of themselves.” But in a “rigged system,” where people are born into poverty or “driven” into poverty once they arrive here from another country, there is no way to escape this cycle. This is not loving our neighbor as we would love ourselves. And this has been going on for a long time.

Facing inhumane conditions in the workplace and society, ethnic neighborhoods have emerged where members of an extended family offer support (housing, employment, and socialization) for new arrivals. These neighborhoods are strengthened by the presence of “ethnically oriented religious and cultural organizations providing important sources of identity.”<sup>78</sup> But it should not have to come to this.

Unfortunately, in the U.S., there is a reluctance to recognize class divisions. The myth is that we live in a classless society. Richard Reeves states that “the United States

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<sup>77</sup> Marc Cooper, “The Heartland’s Raw Deal: How Meatpacking Is Creating a New Immigrant Underclass,” in *Understanding Inequality: The Intersection of Race/Ethnicity, Class, & Gender*, ed. Barbara Arrighi (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 141.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

imagines itself as a classless society, based on a faith in natural equality – that all are “born equal.””<sup>79</sup> He goes on to say that

[I]n a self-defined classless society, people will naturally not want to separate themselves from their fellow citizens. That is why, according to Pew, almost nine in ten Americans define themselves as ‘middle-class’ – further categorized as upper, middle or lower – compared to just 1% who label themselves ‘upper class’ and 12% as lower class (a number that has doubled since the recession hit in 2008).<sup>80</sup>

This can create a false sense of hope, where the working class and poor can become locked into the lowest positions of class. A few “rags-to-riches” examples are created to perpetuate the belief that the oppressed can get ahead. In fact, many people try to blame social class or poverty on the individual, using rationale such as “perhaps they need to study harder, work harder, or worse yet, they are lazy.”

The welfare system is continuously attacked in this country by those who feel their “hard-earned” tax dollars are wasted on “cheaters.” Ironically, it is the rich who receive the biggest forms of “welfare,” such as various tax deductions and other allowances. On the flip side, the “cheaters” receive “payments so low nationwide that in only three states do AFDC benefits plus food stamps bring a household up to the poverty level.”<sup>81</sup> And of course, most of the recipients are the oppressed. For example, “80% of food stamp recipients are single mothers, children, elderly, and the disabled.”<sup>82</sup> The inequality also spans racial lines. “Among the college educated...whites control four times as much wealth as blacks with the same degree.”<sup>83</sup> In addition, the housing markets and lending institutions continue to discriminate against blacks and Hispanics to pay higher mortgage rates or deny their applications altogether, while real estate values grow higher and faster in white communities. Asian Americans are not immune to racism and classism either. The American unions were built on a foundation of racism. These

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<sup>79</sup> Richard V. Reeves, “Classless America, Still?” *Brookings*, August 27, 2014, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/social-mobility-memos/2014/08/27/classless-america-still/>.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> Donna Langston, “Tired of Playing Monopoly?” in *Changing Our Power: An Introduction to Women’s Studies*, eds. Jo Whitehorse Cochrane, Donna Langston, and Carolyn Woodward (Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt Publishing, 1988), 149.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Melvin L. Oliver and Thomas M. Shapiro, *Black Wealth, White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), 8.

organizations worked to ban immigration from Asia, bar immigrants from joining unions, and to beat or kill those who could not be banned or expelled.<sup>84</sup>

Even universities are not exempt from classism. Most institutions are highly dependent on donations from alumni. When the “next generation” applies to the school, “legacy privilege” kicks in, particularly in cases where parents donate to the school. This is more than just an occasional phenomenon. “Notre Dame reserves 25% of its freshman class for legacies.”<sup>85</sup> These students may be less qualified than other applicants, but universities are afraid that the money will stop coming in if the children of alumni parents are rejected. Those who “show the money” seem to have a leg up in the most prestigious institutions.

For many, college begins as a dream, but the dream is quickly forgotten due to reality. Kathleen Kelly, from the “projects,” innocently believed the American rags-to-riches myth, thinking she would become a lawyer. She did not realize that college was necessary to achieve this goal. “People used to laugh when I told them I wanted to be a lawyer when I grew up.”<sup>86</sup> But as a high school dropout, Kathleen realized that life would never get any better on welfare. The stereotype that exists for welfare has a racial bias. Although the typical welfare recipient is a white woman, the most prominent image is that of the “lazy, black mother with many children, taking advantage of the system.” In this case, classism, racism, and sexism are virtually inseparable. This myth continues to deny who the poor really are and to assure white people of their continued advantage over blacks.<sup>87</sup>

Our financial marketplace is not immune to bias. Although free trade is supposed to benefit society in general, the rich continuously win and the working class lose. One support for free trade entertains the idea of taxing those who benefit to compensate those who do not. But this does not happen. Those in the margins do not have the “political clout” to alter the rules for a more just system.

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<sup>84</sup> Glenn Omatsu, “Racism or Solidarity? Unions and Asian Immigrant Workers,” *The Radical Teacher*, no. 46 (1995): 34.

<sup>85</sup> John Larew, “Why Are Doves of Unqualified, Unprepared Kids Getting into Our Top Colleges?” *Washington Monthly*, 23, no. 6 (June 1991): 13.

<sup>86</sup> Gwendolyn Lewis, Patricia Holland, and Kathleen Kelly, “Working-Class Students Speak Out,” *The Radical Teacher*, no. 42 (Fall 1992): 11.

<sup>87</sup> Rosemary Bray, “So How Did I Get Here?” *New York Times Magazine*, 142, no. 49144 (November 8, 1992): 34.

### At the Intersection of Racism and Classism

After college, I spent the next several years in Southern California working for computer manufacturing firms. I received my Master of Business Administration from Pepperdine, taking classes at night, and was married to my wife Gina in 1991 on a beautiful cliff overlooking the Pacific Ocean. One day, my wife and I were traveling from our home in Southern Orange County, California down to San Diego. We passed a sign in a remote stretch of Camp Pendleton, a Marine Corps Base in Northern San Diego County. I had never seen a sign like that and did not understand its meaning.



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Gina explained to me that this image depicts immigrant families who have crossed into the United States illegally and are running across the freeway to continue to escape capture by immigration and customs agents. I had to absorb this for a minute. I said “What?” Although I heard my wife, I did not understand. A mother and father would run their children across a freeway? They must be desperate. Why do they need to risk their lives in this way? What were they running from? Back at home, when I asked these questions, many friends told me the immigrants were escaping tremendous hardship in Mexico and Central America. “There is terrible crime down there; lots of corruption and drugs.” They were running to family and friends already here in the U.S. to begin a new life, a safer life, a life with more opportunity, a life with more hope.

Immigration rights, and specifically, the rights of undocumented people, is a difficult issue for many in the community I serve. Some see undocumented immigrants as a burden, even a threat. Some see them as people who need our help, in need of a fresh start to make a new life. One of my colleagues in Connecticut shared the story of Marco

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<sup>88</sup> This image represents an immigrant crossing sign. These signs have now been taken down in many areas across the nation.

[https://www.google.com/search?rlz=1C1NHXL\\_enUS732US732&q=immigrant+crossing+sign&tbm=isch&source=univ&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj4x7aJnrngAhUqtlkKHfn4BUQQsAR6BAgAEAE&biw=1366&bih=657](https://www.google.com/search?rlz=1C1NHXL_enUS732US732&q=immigrant+crossing+sign&tbm=isch&source=univ&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj4x7aJnrngAhUqtlkKHfn4BUQQsAR6BAgAEAE&biw=1366&bih=657).

Reyes Alvarez,<sup>89</sup> an immigrant from Ecuador, who came to the U.S. in 1997. He subsequently married and had three children, all U.S. citizens. In 2007, Reyes and his family were passengers in a car that “accidentally crossed the Canadian border.” In 2009, a deportation order was issued for Reyes, but he has been allowed to remain with his family through a series of stays of that order. However, in August 2017, ICE officials notified Reyes they planned to deport him on August 8<sup>th</sup>. Reyes then went to the United Methodist Church in New Haven for sanctuary, to protect him from deportation, separation from his family, and being forced to leave behind the life he knew in the U.S. for the previous twenty years. “Just the thought of being separated from my loved ones, and . . . the chance that I would never see them again, was a very heavy burden for them, and, of course, for me,”<sup>90</sup> Reyes said. A short time before this in Ecuador, his family was threatened, and his brother-in-law was killed. Reyes hoped the U.S. would help him stay away the violence in his home country. Returning to Ecuador could prove fatal for Reyes.

U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut called Reyes “a hardworking father and husband who has called Connecticut home for two decades without any criminal wrongdoing.”<sup>91</sup> According to Blumenthal, there has been a marked shift in ICE strategy since the inauguration of President Trump. He states, “It’s a policy of rounding up everyone who’s undocumented, rather than targeting people who are dangerous or have criminal records and pose a threat to our national security.”<sup>92</sup>

Listening to Reyes describe his fear, being separated from his family and those he loved, reminds me of the recent crisis at the border where immigrant families were separated, regardless of the reason. In 2018, the Trump administration enacted a “zero tolerance” policy regarding any illegal entry into the country. This policy led to the “standard practice” of separate classifications for adults and children, with children listed as “unaccompanied minors.” At our Southern border, this crisis made national headlines in the summer of 2018 as an estimate of over 2,500 children were separated from their

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<sup>89</sup> Joanne Utley, “New Haven Church Provides Sanctuary for Immigrant,” New York Conference News, August 9, 2017, <https://www.nyac.com/newsdetail/new-haven-church-provides-sanctuary-for-immigrant-8986284>.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

families.<sup>93</sup> Children were held in rooms, packed like sardines in a can. Parents were separated from their children for weeks, even months. Many had come to the U.S. to seek asylum, but the Administration had “zero tolerance” for them.

The hopeless feeling these families must have felt is overwhelming. I cannot imagine this kind of heartache. I can only understand some small version of this hopeless feeling by remembering when my wife and I became separated from our three-year-old son for just a few minutes in a crowded shopping area. Those minutes felt like months. *We felt like we couldn't breathe.* Life stopped. Fortunately, he came right back to us, but we will never forget that feeling of complete helplessness while our child was unprotected, surrounded by people who didn't notice or didn't care. We were so grateful to have our son back, but why did no one help? Why did everyone walk by and do nothing? I can imagine, when Reyes heard the news ICE was coming to deport him, he felt like saying “*I can't breathe!*”

In fact, the current battle over the “Border Wall,” a structure with the purpose to divide and separate, looms large. It seems the Trump Administration will stop at nothing to get this wall built, even as I was writing this paper, allowing the government to shut down and declaring a National Emergency, using taxpayer dollars to build a barrier that keeps people out. In fact, when the president first took office, there was an executive order put into place to ban people from several countries, primarily those in the Middle East, from coming to the United States. As this was ruled unconstitutional, the president has continued to look for ways to “secure our borders” and keep the criminals out. Ironically, two of his wives were immigrants, who only became citizens after they were married. While immigrants, they worked and enjoyed the benefits of living in the U.S. And as the grandson of a German immigrant, I am confident when I say that the president should not be the judge of who should be in the U.S. and who should not.

Racism and classism are not confined only to these segments of our justice system. Our educational institutions show the disparity with current day segregation. When I first arrived on the Island in 2013, I noticed many school districts within a very

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<sup>93</sup> ACLU, “Family Separation by the Numbers,” accessed March 5, 2019, <https://www.aclu.org/issues/immigrants-rights/immigrants-rights-and-detention/family-separation>.

small distance. In the Huntington Township, there are four school districts covering a seven-square mile area. One of the school districts has just over 100 children per grade in the High School. I thought that seemed very small. In fact, I was right. The rest of New York State averages fifteen school districts per county. Long Island has 127 school districts for only two counties. Segregation has arisen through the “districting policies” of the school districts. And with the segregation of students comes the segregation of families, and population clusters by race. Right here on Long Island, segregation has deepened over the last several years. In fact, statistics from the New York State Department of Education show that from 2004 to 2016, approximately three out of four black students and two out of three Hispanic students attended Majority “Minority” schools.<sup>94</sup> The overcrowding of students in the “Minority” schools varies greatly from the districts. Overlaying class and racial data shows an even bleaker picture of the depth of segregation here on the Island.

The vast majority of Long Island students attend low- and average-need districts. Only 14% of all Long Island students attend high-need districts. There are, however, extremely large racial and ethnic differences: 76% of all students in high-need districts are black and Hispanic. Moreover, the percentage of black and Hispanic students who are schooled in high-need districts is ten times the percentage of white students who are schooled in high-need districts. Given that education is the central factor for upward mobility in our society, this situation predisposes racial and ethnic minorities to further disadvantage, which in the long run is a societal cost shared by everyone alike.<sup>95</sup>

Of importance here is that the number of students “crammed” into the Minority Districts is very high. The number of students per classroom often exceeds 30, and can be as high as 40. One teacher cannot provide the proper instruction and guidance needed for a class of this size. Some students feel neglected, feel they cannot get the help they need, and decide to just give up. This lack of education leads to frustration and disciplinary problems. The infamous “pipeline to prison” is linked to these problems.

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<sup>94</sup> Erase Racism, data from the NYS Department of Education, 2016, [www.eraseracismny.org](http://www.eraseracismny.org), accessed February 9, 2019, [http://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/ERASE\\_Racism-long-island-district-facts.pdf](http://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/ERASE_Racism-long-island-district-facts.pdf).

<sup>95</sup> Erase Racism, data from the NYS Department of Education, 2010, [www.eraseracismny.org](http://www.eraseracismny.org), accessed February 9, 2019, [http://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/ERASE\\_Racism-long-island-district-facts.pdf](http://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/ERASE_Racism-long-island-district-facts.pdf).

Harsh school policies and practices and an increased role of law enforcement in schools that combine to create a “schoolhouse-to-jailhouse track,” in which out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and school-based arrests are increasingly used to deal with student misbehavior, especially for minor incidents, and huge numbers of children and youth are pushed out of school and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. This is more than an education crisis; it is a racial justice crisis because the students pushed out through harsh discipline are disproportionately students of color. Students with disabilities and LGBTQ students are also disproportionately impacted by these ineffective policies.”<sup>96</sup>

Sadly, the cycle of poverty continues in these segregated neighborhoods.

As the data shows, racial segregation in the schools reflects racial segregation in housing as well. It is no surprise to find that the trends for families and students mirror one another. What is disturbing are the policies put into place to purposely divide and separate, sanctioned by the government.

Segregation patterns emerged in the postwar era from housing development that was often segregated by design. Long Island’s most famous suburb, Levittown, is a prime example. The original Levittown deeds forbade occupancy by “any person other than members of the Caucasian race.” Despite the Supreme Court’s 1949 ruling finding such restrictive covenants unconstitutional, private restrictions remained in effect until the Civil Rights Act of 1968. The impact of these restrictions persists: today 89.3% of Levittown’s residents are white, 9.7% are Latino, 4.7% Asian and 0.6% are African-American. Much of Long Island reflects a similar pattern.<sup>97</sup>

Erase Racism provides an interactive map providing the racial makeup of all the public-school districts on Long Island. As indicated, the North Shore has a high percentage of white students and families. In fact, the extreme North Shore is virtually all white. As the previous data has indicated, funding and investment follow the white students and families. Not only school investment and housing are affected by segregation, but graduation rates, employment opportunities, and many other statistics show that white families and students reap many financial benefits, while students and families of color continue to struggle, if not fall further behind the average. On Long Island, racism and classism collide making this one of the most segregated regions in the United States. I can imagine the families and students of the working class and poor,

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<sup>96</sup> Institute for Democratic Education in America, “School-to-Prison Pipeline,” accessed February 15, 2019, [http://www.democraticeducation.org/index.php/issues/school-to-prison\\_pipeline/](http://www.democraticeducation.org/index.php/issues/school-to-prison_pipeline/).

<sup>97</sup> John Powell, Institute on Race and Poverty, Racism and the Opportunity Divide on Long Island (Briefing paper prepared for ERASE Racism, 2002), 5.

weighed down by daily oppression, hardship, and the frustration of being blocked from opportunities, employment, and the ability to use their gifts fully saying, “*I can’t breathe!*”

### **Sexism**

I have spent most of my life living in a “white” world. I have lived in all white neighborhoods, attended all white schools, worked for companies with virtually all white employees. It wasn’t until I attended seminary that I spent significant time encountering anyone who was not white. I knew I had a pretty good life, but of course, I had worked very hard for everything I had. I listened to my parents, teachers, and mentors, went to church, played sports and music in school, and of course studied hard and got good grades. This led to getting into a good college, which led to a fantastic internship, and then a great job in Southern California. Although I knew that it may be more difficult for others with “more challenging circumstances” to do well, I believed the opportunities were there. I saw flyers for scholarships that were offered exclusively for people of color, opportunities for leadership that were given only to women, and in college, I even became aware of a support group for LGBT people. This “evidence” showed me there was an opportunity for everyone. Support was available to all people, all you had to do was work hard, “plug in,” and you would be fine. If you didn’t get to where you wanted to be, then it *must* be that you weren’t doing the work.

The education I received did not offer much to contradict my understanding. Of course, I learned of past injustices that made it impossible for whole segments of people to live freely. We were taught a little about the injustice for Natives and of slavery, but all of that was in the past. By the time I was in college in the late 1980s, I believed that there were laws in place that protected all people. I believed everyone had the same chance for success. But as I moved on from college and began to experience the world, I realized this was not necessarily true.

In Southern California, I worked in finance departments for large computer manufacturing firms. One of the first things I noticed was that all of management in accounting and finance was men, except for one person, my boss. In fact, all engineers, and all management of operations and distribution were men. In accounting, all “clerical workers,” paid by the hour, were women. In my four years there, from 1989 to 1993, no

women were promoted to any supervisor or management position. When I moved to another company, I found almost the same scenario – a few women in lower-level management positions, but all men in higher leadership. I found this odd since in college, from 1985-1989, my business school classes were almost evenly split between men and women in every class. Why were women not in higher leadership positions? Men, who held the positions of power, were not hiring or promoting women. They kept those jobs for themselves.

While pursuing my Master of Business Administration a few years later, I again noticed that in each class, there were as many women as men. After receiving my undergraduate degree in finance, I began working full-time for various manufacturing companies. With my first few positions, I worked for and with many women. Although there were many women in the work place, they held only entry-level, supervisor, and manager positions. The more senior positions of Director and Vice-President were held exclusively by men. During my fifteen years in the business world, this imbalance held true wherever I worked in various regions in the country and with various companies. Then I moved to Westport, Connecticut, where I worked at the headquarters of a manufacturing firm. There, I found women working at the Director Level and Vice President level as well, but only in the Marketing Division. Sales, Operations, Finance, Distribution, and other departments all had exclusively men leading in the high-level roles. “Women are creative. They are good at Marketing. But men are better with numbers and technical information.” This thinking was shared with me by a co-worker in the fall of 1999.

Later that year, I was promoted to a Director of Finance position in Ohio. One year later, I was promoted again to a Director of Finance position back in Westport. In this role, I was responsible for financial planning for the sales, marketing, and finance staffs at the headquarters office, as well as the financial planning for all offices and plants in our national division. Following the annual budget cycle and approval for the calendar year, quarterly updates were required. In my first budget cycle for 2001, I received the salaries of the entire marketing staff, which included 15 new hires. Each of these new employees had just graduated from comparable schools, had no experience beyond an

internship, and were now assigned to various brands of different sizes and complexities. Women and men were spread out with equal responsibilities.

When I received the salary data, I noticed glaring differences right away. Every single man received \$10K more per year than every single woman at the entry level position. There seemed to be other issues with equitable pay, but this was glaring. All the employees were at the same starting place. This was a terrible injustice. I thought for a moment and realized that this was not a mistake. I could see from the data, that women were paid less than men in every category. I took the data with me, went to my supervisor's office and alerted him that I was going to the president to demand action *today*. I proceeded to interrupt the president, who was in a meeting, and demanded that this pay inequity be fixed by close of business that day or I would resign and go to the press. The adjustments were made that day, with a "spin," of course, to make it look like they were rewarding employees instead of correcting an injustice. From that point on, pay inequity continued to dissipate throughout every department in the company.

Roberta Reardon, the State Department of Labor Commissioner, co-chaired a pay equity study that showed powerful results. On a national level, Reardon claimed that "Women earn less than men for doing the same job, particularly women of color." She went on to say, "Women at the upper end of the pay scale are crashing into the glass ceiling while women at the lower end are struggling to get off the sticky floor."<sup>98</sup> In professions where there are a higher percentage of women, census data show that men still earn more than women. Nationally, for example, the 2015 annual median pay for male registered nurses was about \$69,000, compared with \$62,000 for their female counterparts. Male librarians earned a median of about \$54,000, compared with \$50,000 for their female cohorts.<sup>99</sup>

In Suffolk County, the statistics show a similar picture. According to the State Department of Labor, women in this area earn 78.1 percent of male wages, compared with an 86.8 percent statewide average. For New York State, black women make 64.4

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<sup>98</sup> Robert Brodsky, "County Executive Steve Bellone signs bill that stops pay history inquiries," *Newsday*, November 30, 2018, <https://www.newsday.com/long-island/politics/pay-equity-law-suffolk-county-1.24079602>.

<sup>99</sup> Carrie Mason-Draffen, "Equal Pay Day Highlights Gender Pay Gap," *Newsday*, April 2, 2017, <https://www.newsday.com/business/women-s-pay-81-9-cents-for-every-1-men-earn-group-says-1.13335611>.

percent of their male counterparts' wages while Hispanic women are even lower at 55.3 percent.<sup>100</sup>

The effects of sexism are not only revealed through income. They are revealed in many ways, even if at first it is not so obvious. My ordination class began with 17 pastors, 9 men and 8 women. However, during the first appointment season of our three-year journey together, all the men were given full-time appointments. Several women received less than full-time charges. This was the first time in the history of the New York Annual Conference that many “Provisional Elders” in one class had been given part-time appointments. The reason offered was that there were not enough full-time placements for all the pastors. As the time drew near for our class to interview with the Board of Ordained Ministry for ordination, the women serving part-time were not allowed to come forward. They had “not earned enough ministry time” according to our Book of Discipline. Once we completed the interviews, many other women shared with me they were not affirmed for ordination. They were told they “failed to articulate knowledge and understanding in the Administration section.” At that time, to be affirmed for Administration, a candidate was required to explain the local church budget in a narrative fashion and to offer understanding and perspective on “connectionalism” in the United Methodist Church. These women would have to come back again and go through extensive preparation, another round of panel interviews, and demonstrate the competencies required. In the end, in 2009, eight men and only one woman were affirmed for ordination. I spent the next several months in prayer. I struggled to see how I could be ordained in a denomination that treated women this way. Finally, several friends met with me and encouraged me to become ordained and work from within to change the system, just like I planned to do with racism and heterosexism. At this point, I had been serving full time for four years. I decided to follow my friends’ advice.

“As a process, gender creates the social differences that define “woman” and “man.””<sup>101</sup> Gender definitions are perpetuated by continuous reinforcement and interaction between men and women. If all people are created in the image of God, why then in Western Society, do men seem to be ranked *above* women in our culture’s

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Judith Lorber, *Paradoxes of Gender* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 32.

stratification system? Unfortunately, the example I set for my son as he grew up in our house perpetuated sexism. This stems from my own childhood. My parents raised my brothers and me in a “stereotypical manner.” My mother was a homemaker; my father worked in the office. Mom did 100% of the housework – cleaning, cooking, shopping, driving the children to their appointments, etc. Dad did the “outside work – man’s work.” He mowed the grass, cooked on the grill, cleaned the gutters, and more, until I could take over. My wife and I adopted this similar kind of relationship into our own marriage. I now see how this affected our son and his expectations as he is grown and has been in a relationship with his girlfriend for over five years.

For thousands of years, patriarchal societies were the norm around the world. In the Bible, many stories mirror this hierarchy. Biblical texts were written mostly by men, and religious leaders were mostly male, giving the Bible a “male slant” to it that is not so subtle. Many stories and verses have been used to subordinate women, and at times, portraying them as little more than property. “The seed of wife beating lies in the subordination of females and in their subjection to male authority and control. This relationship...institutionalized in the structure of patriarchal family is supported...by a belief system *including a religious one* that makes such relationships seem natural, morally just, sacred.”<sup>102</sup> Unfortunately, the Church has not only supported sexism, it has encouraged it. Clergy members (and others) perpetuate the sense of helplessness women experience with violence, with advice such as “Don’t fight back, you’ll only get him angry.” The thought is that if you let the attacker assault you, you may get away with your life. Ironically, once attacked, the first question often asked is “Did you fight back?” If the answer is “no,” then it is thought “You must have wanted it.”<sup>103</sup>

There are many forms of violence that men inflict on women in our culture today. Besides the obvious physical forms or sexual assault, abuse, and murder, more subtle forms exist. Pornography is one such form. “Pornographic representations of women affect the way that all men see and relate to women.”<sup>104</sup> Men begin to see women as

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<sup>102</sup> R. Emerson Dobash and Russell Dobash, *Violence Against Wives* (New York: The Free Press, 1979), 33.

<sup>103</sup> Whitney Walker, “Why I Fight Back,” in *Listen up: Voices from the Next Feminist Generation*, ed. Barbara Findlen (New York: Seal Press, 1995), 127.

<sup>104</sup> Jackson Katz, “Pornography and Men’s Consciousness: Rethinking Private Pleasure.” *Empathy*, 3, no. 2 (1992): 48.

nothing more than body parts. Repeated use of pornography can lead to difficulties for men to form healthy, intimate relationships with women.<sup>105</sup>

Many women experience sexual harassment in a variety of ways, from leading and lewd comments in the workplace, to being “flashed” in the middle of the night. When my wife was nine months pregnant, she was doing laundry in an outside “hut” adjacent to our apartment building in Southern California. It was dark and she was alone, although there were other people in the parking lot nearby. I was still at work. My wife heard a knock on the door. When she turned around to look, she was flashed. My wife froze. She could not run in her condition and felt trapped, as there was only one door. She was afraid for the baby that she would be hurt. Thank God it did not come to that! The flasher left. But many women are not so lucky. I will never forget the anger I felt later that night when she told me. I also felt helpless. I can only imagine how my wife and so many other women feel who experience something like this.

Several passages from the Pauline Letters have been used to support the suppression of women. For example, “Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent.”<sup>106</sup> However context matters. When studying scripture, it is critical to understand the circumstances surrounding the writing – the audience, the situation, the issue being addressed, and so on. Scholars who have studied these texts over time come to many different conclusions. Some point out that these letters were written to a community facing a conflict. The letter was not necessarily intended to become scripture. In addition, Paul wrote many other letters with ideas and statements that present very different views. Colossians 3:12-18 and Ephesians 5:25-33 teach husbands to respect their wives, so that the “two become one.” In Galatians, the universality of Christ’s love is emphasized. “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”<sup>107</sup> These passages seem to conflict with the verse from 1 Timothy. Individual verses can be taken out of context and used for harm. The overall message of the Bible should always be kept in mind. All

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>106</sup> 1 Timothy 2:11-12 (NRSV). Other texts that have been used to support suppression of women include Ephesians 5:21-24 and 1 Corinthians 11:8.

<sup>107</sup> Galatians 3:28 (NRSV).

people are loved by God, women and men, people of all colors, backgrounds, and ethnicities, as well as sexual orientation.

Over the last several decades, women have not had equal participation in church leadership. Although the percentage of women as clergy has climbed over the last few decades, a Barna Study report from 2017 estimates that “one in eleven Protestant pastors is a woman. This is triple the number from 25 years ago. However, women are often leading smaller churches than men.”<sup>108</sup> Almost all mainline Protestant churches allow women to be clergy, yet less than 10% of the roles are filled by women. Lay leadership is also an issue, particularly in some areas in the nation. In my own denomination, I experienced firsthand the differences of how progress in equality can be interpreted.

In October 2016, I was attending a training in Chicago for Board of Ordained Ministry members from United Methodist Conferences from around the country. Representatives from every Conference in the nation gathered to learn the latest changes coming from the legislative decisions from the General Conference meeting earlier that year. I was a representative of the New York Annual Conference, which encompasses the City, Long Island, Southeast New York, and Western Connecticut. I happened to sit next to the delegation from the Western Pennsylvania Conference. This was interesting since our new Bishop had just come to New York after serving that Conference only 4 weeks prior to this training. Over the three-day event, I got to know the members from Pennsylvania. At one point, the chairperson leaned over to me and said, “Roy, guess what, look who we brought.” I turned around to see who he was pointing at. I did not understand what he meant. The chairperson went on to say, “Look, we brought a woman.” I was taken aback. In 2016, for a Conference in the Northeast Jurisdiction of our denomination to make it sound like that was progress astounded me. I replied, “Look at our delegation,” pointing to our eleven members sitting to my left, with seven women and four men, representing many different ethnicities and backgrounds. This encounter made me think more about the hardship for women in leadership, whether clergy or laity.

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<sup>108</sup> Megan Briggs, “Barna Study: 3 Times More Female Pastors Compared to 25 Years Ago,” *Church Leaders*, February 28, 2017, <https://churchleaders.com/news/299915-barna-study-3-times-female-pastors-compared-25-years-ago.html>.

Even within local church lay ministries, the importance of women has been minimized. In fact, in many instances, the role of women has been “ghettoized,”<sup>109</sup> where a woman, or a group of women, is given power over an area that is meaningless or less important to distract them from something more powerful. For example, women can be assigned to Sunday School, the altar guild, to be secretary for a committee, decorating committees, baking, cooking, and clean-up. But committees that make important strategic decisions regarding the planning and direction of the church, such as Finance, the Administrative Council, or the Board of Trustees, are usually led by men. Even in committees led by women, when finances are involved, men tend to take over allocation control, diminishing the perception of women’s capabilities. “We teach what we are taught. The unexamined prejudices of the parents (and teachers) in our lives are passed on to the children. It is not our fault, but it is our responsibility to interrupt this cycle.”<sup>110</sup> I believe that women, after living for years with pay inequity, disrespect from men, being withheld opportunities simply because of their gender, dealing with discrimination, harassment, and assault, are crying out, “*I can’t breathe!*”

### **Heterosexism**

Men are in competition with each other from a very early age. There is a ranking system, an “acceptance” granted to join the realm of manhood. “Masculinity is a homosocial enactment.”<sup>111</sup> Men take risks, test themselves, and perform acts of heroism for approval from other men; to be accepted into the club, you need to represent the epitome of masculinity. The label of “sissy” is unacceptable. Men need to be macho, tough. The labels and stereotypes go on and on. I have participated in stereotyping, wanting revenge against someone I did not understand.

I went to high school about 30 miles northwest of Chicago. Growing up, I knew almost nothing about the LGBTQ community. No one ever spoke about the issues this community faces. In fact, the entire topic of sexuality was “taboo.” All we received was a very brief “education” in middle school health class. But as I was nearing the end of ninth

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<sup>109</sup> Tanya Bennett, Lecture, Religion and the Social Process, 2/17/2004.

<sup>110</sup> Beverly Daniel Tatum, “*Why Are the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*” and *Other Conversations About Race* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 12.

<sup>111</sup> Michael S. Kimmel, *Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 34.

grade, I began to notice something strange about the tenth grade English teacher in the next room. He was a very large man, 6'6" and about 230 pounds. He was wearing sweatshirts every day, even with temperatures soaring to 80 degrees in the spring, dripping sweat as he was teaching. Of greater concern to me, as the days and weeks went by, it appeared that his chest was "growing."

I finally asked another student about this who explained that this teacher was going through "the change." At that time, I only knew this phrase to refer to women and menopause. I later found out that he was transgender. That was a shock. I only knew the "definition" of transgender and nothing more. I noticed his mannerisms, how he would sit on the top of his desk, very close to the front row of students. I became afraid. I did not want to be in his class; and I "made sure" that I had a different teacher for English class the next year. When I came back for school in September, this teacher had left the school. I only heard about him again, when a boyfriend of my best friend, "Amy," broke up with her and moved in with this teacher right after our graduation. Before we left for college that fall, this young man died of AIDS.

We were devastated. Even though I did not know precisely how our friend contracted this disease, I blamed the teacher. I hated him; I wanted him dead. I thought to myself, "this is what transgenders are all about." Judgements, categorizations, stereotypes, and evil thoughts began to fly through my mind. This tragedy stayed with me for many years. It wasn't until seminary that I began to see things differently. I know I still need to journey with someone. I know I need to listen, to hear their "deep story," to understand, and selfishly, to help me with my own healing. I support transgenders in my mind, but my heart is still trying to "get" there; my love is not fully authentic.

"Lesbians, gay males, bisexuals, and transgender people are among the most despised groups in the United States."<sup>112</sup> However, the creations and contributions from people who identify with this group are endless. Their offerings have become a part of our culture, a part of our history, a part of who we are. Yet homophobia still rages in our country. This disease, this fear, limits heterosexuals from developing close same-sex relationships, encouraging heterosexuals to treat others badly which compromises their own integrity, restricts communication with a large segment of the population, and

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<sup>112</sup> Warren J. Blumenfeld, *Homophobia: How We All Pay the Price* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 3.

prevents the sharing of gifts and abilities of LGBTQ people. These fears can be traced to one of the most sacred sources of Christian beliefs – the Bible.

In the Midwest, homosexuality was not a hot topic. Leviticus 18:22 “taught” us everything we needed to know. We learned that homosexuality was forbidden, unnatural, a terrible sin. I did not encounter hardly anyone who identified as LGBTQ (at least to my knowledge) until after college when I moved to Southern California. I met my wife right after I moved there. Someone in her family is gay, who lived close by at the time. She waited almost one year before introducing us due to my stereotype of gay people. This developed from what I had seen on television and what I heard from others in my youth. I thought they were all flamboyant and “sissy.” I knew in “liberal California” I would eventually meet someone who was gay, and I worried about catching AIDS, or worse yet, that I might become friends with someone “like that.” When I finally met my wife’s family member, I lectured her for not letting me know beforehand, so I would “be prepared.” She asked me, “what difference does it make?” That question stopped me. Upon reflection, I realized only my fear and ignorance made a difference. Homophobia is the fear that other men will unmask us, emasculate us, reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up, that we are not real men.”<sup>113</sup> Although my understanding on homosexuality and gender identity has changed drastically, I still need to continue to do the work in my own heart, *and* I need to help others overcome their fear to help end the oppression of LGTBQ people. Due to fear and control, too many people in this community are not living abundant life. Dealing with constant exclusion, hatred, fear, misconception, judgment, and dehumanization, I can hear each LGBTQ person shouting, “*I can’t breathe!*”

Jesus said,

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.<sup>114</sup>

I see this statement as a call to myself and my community. If we are disciples of Jesus, then our work needs to be aligned with his teachings. I believe we are called to be the

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<sup>113</sup> Kimmel, 34.

<sup>114</sup> Luke 4:18 (NRSV).

hands and feet of Jesus, to bring tangible help as well as opportunity to the poor, to assist others to “see” the systemic injustice in our systems and to join and support the work to change them, allowing all people to experience the abundant life Jesus offers.

There are so many different segments of our society weighed down by prejudice, discrimination, and white supremacy. Census estimates show that white men represent approximately 30% of the U.S. population.<sup>115</sup> Within that number, there are white men that are poor, disabled, gay, or any other classification that would separate them from the dominant group. It is a small group dictating what the rules are. But as more people in the oppressed groups are taking a stand against policies, laws, and systems of oppression, the power white men holds is in question, if not in jeopardy. This project reveals insights on white male privilege and complacency. I hope this would lead to an increased desire to connect with others to first listen, then engage and act for systemic change that brings abundant life to all people.

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<sup>115</sup> Nia Malika-Henderson, “White Men are 31 Percent of the American Population. They Hold 65 Percent of the Elected Offices,” *Washington Post*, October 8, 2014, [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com), accessed February 17, 2019, [https://www.google.com/search?rlz=1C1NHXL\\_enUS732US732&ei=xyiSXPoVi-r8BvC1i7AL&q=washington+post+white+men+percent+of+US+population&oq=washington+post+white](https://www.google.com/search?rlz=1C1NHXL_enUS732US732&ei=xyiSXPoVi-r8BvC1i7AL&q=washington+post+white+men+percent+of+US+population&oq=washington+post+white).

## CHAPTER 3

### PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

In this chapter, I will provide details of the project itself. First, I will review the purpose of the project. Next, the purpose and selection criteria of the Local Advisory Committee (LAC) will be explained. The materials used at each session and a summary of the discussion and initial observations will be offered. For LAC meetings two through four, I shared videos from the Revolutionary Love Conferences<sup>116</sup> of 2017 and 2018. Every April since 2007, this Conference has been held at Middle Church in New York City. Speakers from around the nation and world come to share their stories, their insights, and their strategies to train anyone interested to help create a better world for all.

Middle Collegiate Church and The Middle Project, an institute that trains leaders for a just society, offer the Revolutionary Love Conference each April for leaders working toward the Reign of God on Earth. Past conferences have addressed issues such as the power of story to train leaders, the use of artistic worship to create multiracial communities, training leaders to manage change and conflict, analyzing the dynamics of race, gender, class and power, and the connections between faith, justice and the economy.<sup>117</sup>

I shared the following videos from past conferences with the LAC:

- Meeting 2: “Poverty, Policy, and Advocacy” with Sister Simone Campbell (2018)<sup>118</sup>
- Meeting 3: “Our History and the Violence of White Supremacy” with Mark Charles and Brian McLaren (2018)<sup>119</sup>
- Meeting 4: “The Call to Revolutionary Love” with Valerie Kaur (2017)<sup>120</sup>

These particular videos were selected to provide a wider look at the various problems and injustices in our society, as well as to offer different presentation styles for the

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<sup>116</sup> Revolutionary Love Conference, <http://revolutionaryloveconference.com/#register>.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Sister Simone Campbell presentation “*Poverty, Policy, and Advocacy*” at the Revolutionary Love Conference, Middle Collegiate Church, NY, April 6, 2018. <http://revolutionaryloveconference.com/videos>.

<sup>119</sup> Mark Charles and Rev. Dr. Brian McLaren, presentation “*Our History and The Violence of White Supremacy*” at the Revolutionary Love Conference, Middle Collegiate Church, NY, April 7, 2018. <http://revolutionaryloveconference.com/videos>.

<sup>120</sup> Valerie Kaur, presentation “*The Call to Revolutionary Love*” at the Revolutionary Love Conference, Middle Collegiate Church, NY, April 28, 2017. <http://revolutionaryloveconference.com/videos-2>.

information to be shared, possibly impacting the committee members differently. Sister Campbell provides a stunning visual and matter-of-fact look at the effects of the Trump Tax-Reform Policies on different classes in our nation. Mark Charles portrays the work of President Abraham Lincoln as the “Great Emancipator” in a very different light than is commonly taught in our schools. Valerie Kaur shares a poetic, sermon-like presentation on the tragedies and hate facing the Sikh community following September 11, 2001, and the different way to see the call of all people to work towards a revolutionary way to love one another and ourselves. Finally in this chapter, I will share the methodology used to choose five interviewees from the North Shore of Long Island. Summaries of each interview will be provided.

The project includes two parts. Part one consisted of the selection of and partnering with the Local Advisory Committee. I chose members from my church to learn with me, to assist me, and to support me throughout this project. For part two, I conducted five interviews with white men, two serving as clergy and three serving as laity in the United Methodist Church, who currently live on the North Shore of Long Island. My goal was to listen to their history, their background, their experiences, as well as their understandings and effects of the problems in our society. I also hoped to hear their clear definition of abundant life, in relation to issues of race and racism, economic diversity and lack of opportunity due to sexism and classism as specific issues. In summary, what is social justice as a mandate for those of the Christian faith and how does such understanding shape abundant life? Although five men represent a very small sample of those who live and serve here on the Island, I do believe that through these interviews, I obtained some significant insights.

As stated in chapter one, although I implied throughout the initial documents (the Prospectus and IRB forms) that my project was focused on “White, Male Privilege,” I did not mean to limit my inquiries and research only to sexism and racism. What I hoped to ascertain were the thoughts of a group of white men related to theology, service, and witness as they apply in a broad section of social justice topics. These included many of the injustices our society struggles with today, not just sexism and racism, but also classism, heterosexism, and any others they might choose to discuss. Many of these concerns intersect in a way that is difficult to separate in conversation and in scholarship.

Throughout my work with the LAC and those interviewed, I made it as clear as possible that I was interested in learning their beliefs and experiences on a wide range of difficult issues facing our communities today. My hope was to listen, understand, and formulate patterns and/or insights. I share my own story of awakening to the connection between abundant life and social justice for all people. I hoped to learn why many men are moved to speak and act in ways that help people in a systemic way, while others, who believe in equality, justice, and opportunity for all, remain complacent.

### **The Local Advisory Committee**

This became very important for me in the selection of members to participate in the LAC. Since my project focuses on speaking only to a group of white men, I wanted to include the voices of women on this committee. I believe it is invaluable to hear the perspective of women on these topics as well. I hoped to hear many perspectives, questions, and experiences to discuss and explore.

I chose all members and leaders of the Centerport United Methodist Church (CUMC) where I serve as pastor. Three men and three women were selected to keep the balance of voices across gender. All six have lived on the North Shore of Long Island for at least the last ten years. In fact, many of them have lived on the Island for decades, even their whole life. All are white, and all six are between 50 and 70 years old. Like the requirement I set for those I interviewed, I selected committee members who believe in justice, opportunity, and equality for all. I narrowed my search in this manner to further understand what holds people back or inspires them toward engaging in ministries of justice.

The commitment of these individuals was overwhelming, right from the initial phone call personally inviting them to take part in this project. The replies were quick and unanimous. Everyone responded with an emphatic “yes” to supporting and serving on the committee. In fact, each member’s interest was to learn more, discuss more, and offer input and experiences relating to this topic. We agreed that we would meet for four sessions from October through January. As my project involved interviewing male participants, and many LAC committee members would not be participating in the interviews directly, I had to do a good deal of explaining and teaching. The entire LAC

needed to understand the purpose of the project. Over the last two years, I have been immersed in study on topics including privilege; the members of the LAC have not been exposed to the same information and discussions. Since all six are members and leaders of Centerport UMC and the church had not recently been active in ministries of justice and equality, I privately hoped that the LAC members would be moved and inspired to begin working in justice ministries once there is a greater understanding and renewed commitment.

### **Meeting 1**

We began each of our meetings with prayer. As we gathered in the sanctuary following worship, I hoped our hearts were already open to listen and discern together. At our first meeting in early October, each member shared why they agreed to take part in this project. Several felt they were aware of the ongoing disparities in our community and society but were not sure how to help. Some did not trust information they received from media sources. They were not clear what was real and what was “fake news.” We then reviewed the first draft of the prospectus. This helped clarify the purpose and the plan for the project. The members delved into a deep discussion surrounding past and current concerns, such as the march in Charlottesville, the police shootings of unarmed men, the many mass shootings at schools and in our cities, hate rhetoric, division, and other difficult topics. I listened carefully, letting them form their own community, to “put on the table” their fears, anxieties, and hopes at the beginning of our time together, hoping that would help our conversations going forward.

### **Meeting 2**

At our second meeting in early November, following our prayer, we reviewed the updated prospectus and the initial IRB (Institutional Review Board) documents. There was significant discussion on the initial interview questions I had prepared. The feedback was generally positive, however, there were some reservations about the line of questioning. One of the men did not criticize outright, but implied that the questions were leading. This was confirmed a few days later by the IRB committee that asked for more reflexive questions, allowing those interviewed to develop and share their answers. Based

on this feedback, I recrafted and resubmitted the questions and documents. The LAC, Dr. Kendall, and the IRB Review Board all agreed that the second version of the questions was reflexive and much more open-ended.

Later in our second meeting, the LAC and I watched a video from the April 2018 Revolutionary Love Conference held at Middle Church in New York City. This session was led by Sister Simone Campbell and titled, “Poverty, Policy, and Advocacy.” I hoped to better understand the thoughts and feelings of the committee members when presented with “visuals” of the economic impact of policies and tax laws in the United States. Immediately following the video, one member yelled out “Wow!” As Sister Campbell had seven volunteers move forward and back (representing the effects of current income growth statistics and the recent tax policy changes), the visual was painful but effective. Coming from a Top 5% community (generally speaking) we all watched the Top 5% individual move further and further away from the others. The Top 1% representative literally lapped around to the other side of the sanctuary. The bottom 20% individual actually moved backward, and others barely moved at all. Several on the LAC said this “hit me in a new way.” They discussed the “unfairness” of economic policies, circumstances, and the inequity in opportunities in education and employment. One question arose. “What can we possibly do to help?” The conversation moved toward the benefits of meeting and listening to others outside of our own community, specifically regarding homelessness and immigration in communities on Long Island.

As an example, in Huntington Station, an area about six miles from our church, there is a significant Hispanic population. In this hamlet, 43.4% of the 35,000 people are Hispanic<sup>121</sup>. There is also a significant homeless population. Virtually all the homeless are Hispanic and the vast majority are undocumented immigrants. With the risk of ICE arresting and deporting them, many of the homeless stay “hidden” from public view. They stay in tents in the forested areas, away from the public. For the past twenty-five years, our church has participated in a community organization called HIHI (Huntington Interfaith Homeless Initiative).<sup>122</sup> This program offers our homeless the opportunity to be

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<sup>121</sup> Statistical Data from Citi-Data.com for Huntington Station, New York, [www.citi-data.com](http://www.citi-data.com), accessed March 11, 2019, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Huntington-Station-New-York.html>.

<sup>122</sup> There are nine villages and towns that make up the Township of Huntington, NY. Centerport is the smallest in population and size.

in a warm, safe place during the cold winter. Every night, a bus picks up those who would like to participate and brings them to a house of worship. Volunteers make and serve dinner, set up mats and mattresses, show movies, play music, provide entertainment, and supply overnight chaperones to assist in any way. In the morning, the group is brought back to a shelter where those participating choose to stay or venture out as they desire.

Everyone on the LAC participates in this HIHI initiative. Following the presentation by Sister Campbell, the conversation centered around trying to do more for them. Some on the LAC wanted to find the participants of the HIHI program employment opportunities, offer training for skills, and legal aid. CUMC had voted earlier in 2018 to become a “Sanctuary Church,” sheltering undocumented immigrants from deportation and ICE raids. Witnessing the injustices and illegal deportations around the country has caught the attention of many in our community. I felt in this moment that as we bring to light more ways to connect, support, and work for change, the LAC and CUMC are awakening to new possibilities.

### **Meeting 3**

The third LAC meeting took place in early December. We began by reviewing the final prospectus and IRB documents. Although I had completed a few interviews, I wanted to wait until all of them were finished before the LAC and I discussed them. We spent most of our time watching and discussing another video from the 2018 Revolutionary Love Conference featuring Brian McLaren and Mark Charles, titled “Our History and the Violence of White Supremacy.” I had a hunch that this video may stir up more conflict given the challenging subject matter. I purposely placed this in the middle of our three presentations to drive deeper conversation, but to not risk ending our work together with too much controversy. The video lasted about an hour (the longest by far) and the information did in fact challenge the committee members. As the video played, I noticed body language, sighs, shifting in seats, and faces that were very tight. The discussion that followed confirmed my hunch that they were struggling. They did not like the presentation. Although they agreed that the information was important and agreed with the evidence presented that Lincoln was not the “Great Emancipator” as has been taught

in schools for a long time, the group did not like how Lincoln was, as they put it, “shredded,” with no positive light brought to his other accomplishments. They struggled with such a harsh portrayal of Lincoln’s lack of real compassion and desire for equality for the slaves. Admittedly, when I first saw the video, I struggled quite a bit too. It takes a lot to “re-learn.” It is difficult to tear down the walls of privilege, to learn the truth about history. For myself, the difficulty lies in what I knew would become a call to teach and to draw others to the knowledge I had learned. I knew this would not only be difficult but also risky. I shared with the LAC members that the next meeting would include a shorter video that would present very differently.

#### **Meeting 4**

Our fourth meeting included a discussion regarding my five interviews. The LAC members were interested to learn any insights I had gained in my time of listening. I shared findings with them, some that I expected and some that surprised me. These will be shared in the next chapter. We then watched the final video presentation for our committee led by Valerie Kaur from the 2017 Revolutionary Love Conference titled, “The Call to Revolutionary Love.” I knew this presentation would come across differently than the other videos. I wanted to end on a hopeful note, with a sense of call that would inspire. The body language of the committee members was much more positive during this presentation. Immediately after it finished, one member asked if we could have Valerie come and speak at our church. Everyone said they liked her style, that she was inviting and inclusive. The only concern from the presentation was that she “went after” President Trump in the beginning, criticizing his rhetoric and policies, which may alienate some conservatives in our church. But overall, the imagery in the video of “breathing and pushing through the pain,” the stories of the tragedies and struggles of the Sikh community since 9/11, the problems with immigration, and the call to love ourselves, others, and our opponents, struck a chord with the LAC. There was lengthy discussion on these topics and a new vigor and excitement coming from the team. This approach was a great way to end our last session. We closed in prayer and looked forward to our Site Visit, which I will also summarize in the next chapter. The committee also expressed a great interest in reading the final version of my paper.

## **Interviews**

The other major component to this project, of course, was the interviews. I selected five white men who have lived on the North Shore of Long Island for at least the last five years. Although the subject matter focused on only one subset of the population, white men, I did feel it was important to find potential interview candidates that came from diverse backgrounds. From the five men selected, some have lived on the Island their whole life, while others have moved to the area from other parts of the country. One lived in South America for most of his childhood. The men ranged from 33-63 years of age. I selected two clergy and three laity for possible differences in insights and perspectives. Although my original intention was to interview men from various denominations, scheduling did not permit this. In the end, all five men I interviewed are currently active in the United Methodist Church.

Even though I knew each participant, at the beginning of each interview, I introduced myself as a Doctor of Ministry student from Drew University and provided the purpose of the interview. We carefully reviewed the Sample Consent Form together and I answered any questions they had. All interviews were held in the participant's house of worship, and in a private space to maintain confidentiality. Each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes. With permission of the participant, I recorded and took written notes of each interview. Each person signed the consent form and a copy of the form was provided for each interviewee. Follow-up conversations have continued with each participant.

After I introduced the topic and discussed the process for the interview, I proceeded to ask the interview questions shown in Appendix 5. As I stated in chapter one, it was important to me to frame questions that were open-ended to allow the interviewee to feel free to express their stories, their experiences without any influence or leading from me. Following these questions, the participants were invited to share other thoughts or experiences pertaining to the topic.

## George

My first interview was with *George*,<sup>123</sup> a fifty-year-old husband and father of four girls, who has been a member of the Centerport United Methodist Church for the past fifteen years. George is a white man, born in New York, with three other siblings. He currently is very active in church, serving as a Sunday School teacher, leading the Youth Group, and serving in mission locally and regionally. His father served as a pastor and professor at a seminary in Buenos Aires, Argentina for the large part of his childhood. George and his family came back to Harlem for one year when he was six years old and spent one year in Germany when he was eleven before returning to the seminary in Argentina. While at the seminary, George grew up with children of other professors from many nations such as Sweden, Germany, Canada, and Chile. He stated that virtually all the parents, students, and faculty were white. Those inside the seminary compounds were “fairly well-off” with plenty of food, housing and other necessities; those outside experienced more varied circumstances, where some were “well-off” while others struggled to provide basic needs for their families.

George described the seminary as inclusive and ecumenical, a mix of Disciples of Christ, Methodist, Lutheran, and other denominations; Argentina, however, was “96% Catholic, with rampant anti-Semitism.” Although his father was very involved with human rights, participating in demonstrations and justice work outside the seminary compound, George himself was sheltered from this work for his own protection. Youth were occasionally kidnapped and killed for demonstrating different beliefs. Phones were tapped and students in the seminary were arrested frequently. The strict dictatorship and lack of openness in society created an “intimidating environment” for George and other students during their childhood.

As a professor in science at a local university, it came as no surprise to me that George carefully thought through his answers to the interview questions. When asked about his personal understanding of the term “white,” his response seemed to flow very easily. “White is determined by skin color.” George went on to say that the term “Caucasian” applies to those of European descent growing up and living in America. In Argentina, where most native residents are of Spanish and Latin descent, they consider

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<sup>123</sup> Interview with *George* at the Centerport United Methodist Church, NY, November 29, 2018.

themselves white, while in the U.S., these same people may not necessarily be considered white. It was very interesting to learn more of the history of Argentina. They too shared in the notion of Manifest Destiny. The indigenous people were exterminated in the 1800's. Those few that are left today are extremely poor, relegated to the far north in the mountains, or to the far south in a remote region. Like the United States, those with native heritage in Argentina are not respected or treated with justice and equality.

As George recalled his first memories of understanding the term "white," he described being the only "white kid" in his Harlem school in the early 1970's. A few years later in Argentina, his mother told him his best friend back in New York was "black." George also remembers a time when his older brother was mugged while he was walking with him. Later, George described to the police that the suspect had "big bushy hair." The cops laughed at his description. George had not yet learned the term "afro." His understanding of "white" continued to change as he learned more about what it meant to *not* be white. "Bad things do not happen to white people like they do to others. White means not being other."

"White means American, in the way white men think of it; others come from somewhere else." George has struggled with these definitions and classifications all his life. He does not agree with the "separation" this creates and the political, economic, and societal impact that flows out of these terms. He has struggled with having to shift his understanding from nation to nation and across different regions of the U.S. as he has lived in California, Texas, and New York. "In the U.S., whites are ok. Those that are not white are under suspicion. Whites here in the states never assume I come from abroad." He further elaborates that in the U.S., many whites stereotype Hispanics as lazy and being prone to illegal behavior, wondering if they are here legally, just by looking at them. On the contrary, George describes the seminary in Buenos Aires as inclusive, with an emphasis on treating people with equal respect and dignity. The differences from various life experiences and circumstances are to be celebrated, not criticized and feared.

As we moved to the themes of justice and equality, George stated that "Justice is an ideal. It doesn't really exist. Culturally we do not embrace it." He referenced our own church and the American Flag in the back of the sanctuary. We also have paintings of Jesus as a white man with blue eyes and light brown hair. George stated these can be

“unintended symbolism” that does harm. He spoke at length about the controversy over standing for the national anthem in the National Football League. As players kneel to express their struggles with injustices for people of color in our society, George could not understand how some could interpret that as an insult to our troops. The intense focus and backlash players and teams received for expressing their thoughts concerned him. On the flip side, current political battles over voter rights seem ridiculous to George. According to him, most voter fraud is committed by whites. However, many politicians point toward people of color as the group taking advantage of the system.

Speaking to the idea of abundant life, George believes we are discouraged from pursuing it. In Argentina, he felt the church was acting against the teachings of Jesus, and these sentiments were echoed when he returned and experienced life in the U.S. The pursuit of money and power for so many people can crowd out the call of discipleship. When George was young, he felt like the church tried to preach and justify the wealth people accumulated and hoarded. He left the church for several years and pursued a life of just trying to help those in need. George believes that for the poor, abundant life takes on a material dimension. Putting food on the table, having clean water to drink, providing a home for your family, obtaining and sustaining employment, and having access to education and healthcare becomes your ideal. On the other hand, George continues to explain that for those with their material needs satisfied, abundant life takes on a spiritual component. Your existence *should* focus on making life better for others. Unfortunately, in our society, he states that the media and the general population have bought into a mechanism of only providing “scraps” for those in need.

Personally, George does not believe he has abundant life. Although he is appreciative of all that he has - a beautiful family, a nice home, good employment and health, a wonderful family, and his material needs met - he states, “things have reached a point where I have to do very little to keep it going.” He believes he does a good job at all he is “supposed” to be doing, such as raising his girls to be good Christian women, working hard, and helping others. But something seems to be missing, a “lack of drive.”

George claims there is a clear biblical call to bring abundant life to others, as reflected in Jesus’ teachings, such as serving “the least of these,”<sup>124</sup> and using our gifts

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<sup>124</sup> Matthew 25:34-40 (NRSV).

and abilities to help others.<sup>125</sup> He provided many examples such as advocating for rights such as Universal Health Care, helping immigrants develop skills and find jobs, and mentoring youth and children. “It is imperative that we discover our gifts and use them to help others.” He also spoke at length on the importance of finding the best use of his time. It is “particularly demoralizing” for George to find his work is not making a difference. Since this has happened to him in the past, he is hesitant to “jump in right away” to help. He questions what percentage of donations goes to directly help those in need instead of going to overhead costs. “I need things to be clear; I need to see a path. I need to understand how to do the work that will really help before I engage.” George wants to be able to “see” the difference he is making and be able to measure success in some way that makes sense. “If I feel that what I am or will be doing is good, then I will engage.” George is not currently active in ministries of justice, equality, and opportunity, but he recognizes the importance of the work to be done. At that point, the interview ended.

### **Bart**

Later that day, I had the pleasure of interviewing *Bart*,<sup>126</sup> a very active member and leader at Centerport UMC. He is a retired mechanical engineer who grew up and has lived his entire life within a five- mile radius. He is the middle child, with two older sisters and two significantly younger brothers. His father was a WWII veteran who moved out of the city to suburban Suffolk county upon his return from the war. Bart described his home as “loving and supportive.” Growing up in the 1950’s and 1960’s, most of his neighborhood consisted of families that moved out of New York City following the war to start a family and raise their children with more space than the city provided. Their neighborhood was full of children. The bus stop was “huge.” Although his neighborhood was white, there was an adjacent neighborhood that was predominately black. His community was middle class and included many events and activities such as parades and fairs. There were several farms and wooded areas to explore as well. Bart described that his happy childhood changed when his older sister was diagnosed with

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Interview with *Bart* at the Centerport United Methodist Church, NY, November 29, 2018.

multiple sclerosis. As her mobility lessened, eventually becoming bedridden, the tension in the house grew in a way that affected everyone. But even given these challenges, overall, Bart described his childhood as “good.”

Up through fifth grade, Bart and his sisters attended Catholic school and went to Sunday Mass faithfully every week. He participated in the choir, Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD), and learned to be an altar boy. After fifth grade, Bart went to public school. Although he never learned why, Bart suspected his parents had a falling out with the church. Bart recalled the Mass in the Catholic church was spoken and sung in Latin. He never understood what was being said. But going to church faithfully did have a positive, lasting spiritual effect for him.

As the interview transitioned, Bart described his understanding of white as Caucasian people of European descent. When he was very young, Bart remembered noticing people with different skin color. He observed whole neighborhoods where people with darker skin color lived together and that the houses and cars were not as nice as in other neighborhoods. When he was in Catholic School, Bart did not interact with students of color. Many students came from far away to attend this private school. But things changed when he entered public school in the fifth grade. At this setting, he observed both students who came from wealthy families and those that did not. According to Bart, none of the wealthy students were people of color. Bart also noticed differences in the way students were treated. Teachers would call on white students more frequently and recognize their accomplishments in what he said was a “more enhanced way.” Worse yet, faculty and students alike would denigrate students of color, using various ethnic jokes and making fun of physical differences. In his own family, Bart had an uncle who would use derogatory labels to describe others. Jews, Blacks, and others would be referred to in ways that were offensive to Bart. His uncle used the “N” word, along with many other hurtful labels. When he heard these words, Bart would flinch. But he was taught to respect his elders and not question in a way that would lead to correction.

Bart then went in a different direction. He supported some use of stereotypes as helpful. He claimed that stereotypes should not be viewed to “ping” someone necessarily, but to attribute culture to think about life around them. For example, he said, “Asian

Americans are more driven.” In Bart’s mind there is some truth in that stereotype because he said, “Education is valued by that culture.”

When asked about his definitions of justice and equality, Bart came up with the word “fairness.” All people should be respected and treated the same. He went on to say that “all people should be given the same opportunity.” Asking to clarify, Bart repeated the phrase given the same opportunity, emphasizing the word given. Whether they have tattoos, they wear jewelry in “non-traditional places” on their body, or they have a different skin color, Bart believes all people should be given the same opportunities for education and employment. Unfortunately, that is not happening today, he admitted. There is a great deal of inequity in our society, “but we need to keep trying, working towards fairness for all.”

Defining abundant life was very challenging for Bart. Being an active Christian his whole life, he said he “felt foolish to not have a clear definition yet.” He describes his definition as “in progress.” Twenty years ago, Bart would have associated abundant life more with life here on Earth, in the present. Now he would combine this with life everlasting. “Jesus was saying if you believe in me, salvation I will give to you.” Bart went on to describe that a faithful person would have joy in life no matter what their circumstances are. However, this definition applies, he said, to those who have the “necessities of life” already satisfied. According to Bart, no one should have to worry about food, clothing, shelter, or living in fear of other people. Everyone needs to have a safe place to live and grow. Everyone should receive respect and kindness. But many people struggle with these important aspects of life. Far too many people live in poverty, in shame, in fear. They are not living an abundant life. People struggle to make ends meet. Families live in war-ravaged areas. Many live with whole communities who are prejudiced against them due to their race, their gender, their sexuality, etc. They face societal dangers from people around them, from people who hate them and want to do them harm. Bart cannot imagine what life is like for them. “The worst I have ever received is an occasional Polish joke. But it is not like what these people experience.” When asked to estimate, Bart admitted that there is likely *more than* 50 million people in this nation that are not experiencing abundant life. And for Bart, there is a clear biblical mandate to help.

“Jesus told us to care for the widows, the orphans, and really anyone experiencing hardship, persecution, and peril.” Bart tries to live his life by following the scripture from the Gospel of Luke 12:48, “To whom much has been given, much is required.”<sup>127</sup> “I have been given a lot, therefore I need to give a lot.” During the interview, Bart stated that he is doing work to provide abundant life for others, at least in some ways. He participates in work with the homeless and poor, such as HHHI and Midnight Run (a ministry that provides food and clothing to the homeless in New York City). Bart volunteers weekly at the local food pantry and serves in a summer mission called United Action Reach-Out Mission by Youth (UM ARMY). This organization provides repairs, cleaning, and restoration to homeowners who physically and/or financially cannot do so for themselves. At the core of this mission is connection and deepening relationships that provide hope and transformation to those who are alone. Bart said, “There is a bit of joy brought back into their life. They have hope again. To help provide some light in their darkness is very important.”

Bart described conversations he has heard from many who have traveled to poor nations and areas of the United States where people who are poor and struggling “have deep faith and spirituality that is palpable.” There is both a spiritual component and a material component to abundant life. Bart is continuing to refine his definition of abundant life to match what Jesus meant, so that he can better help others.

What was shared more than once by Bart in this interview was the importance of personal encounter, connection, developing relationships, and listening to others that can lead to transformation for all involved. Through the time he has spent serving and encountering others, he recognizes that “people are people.” When he is serving, Bart does not seem to notice a purple streak in someone’s hair or that someone is black. During the encounter itself, those “classifications or categories” seem to disappear. It is only later, upon reflection, and particularly if specifically asked, that Bart will recall differences like these. Bart goes on to notice that when he is serving others and helping to meet their basic material needs, it seems they feel and recognize a deeper faith, and the spiritual side of abundant life grows as well.

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<sup>127</sup> Luke 12:48 (NRSV).

Bart feels like he should be doing more. Although he is serving in many ways in the church and in the community, Bart feels that doing “anything else other than serving seems more selfish in nature.” For example, focusing on caring for your yard too much is not what really is important. What he tries to do is make life better for others. He is still trying to discern how to apportion his time. “If an opportunity feels right, I will do it.” I personally would describe that as Spirit-led discernment. Bart’s goal is trying to get closer to Christ. He continually asks himself, “How do I do this? How can I get closer?”

Discipleship is a big issue in church. How do we define discipleship? Is this only participating in Bible Study, praying and worshipping? Is there more to it? Bart explains “there is poverty all around us. There are prisons where inmates are not experiencing abundant life and the system is stacked against many who are put there. How can we look down on folks in the prison system or those who get beaten up for the color of their skin, for their religious beliefs, for their sexuality, etc. I am still searching for more ways to engage.” At that point, the interview ended.

### **Harry**

The next day, I drove about twenty miles away to another town on the North Shore. I first met *Harry*,<sup>128</sup> a friend and colleague of mine who has served for six years as pastor of the United Methodist Church in town. He is in his mid-50’s, is married, and is a father of a college student son. Harry grew up ten miles from Centerport on the North Shore with his parents and older sister. He described his father as Dutch, coming to New York from Alexandria, Virginia as a young adult. His mother was raised in Brooklyn and is of Sicilian descent. Harry remembers spending most of his family time with his mother’s family. He described these times as “less stereotypically white” than spending time with his father’s family. When asked to explain this, Harry mentioned that life seemed more about family and community with “big Italian family gatherings.” Everyone was “in each other’s lives.” His father’s side was more individually focused and “success driven” in the way our society defines.

His father was a Republican Committeeman and his mother was a “stay-at-home mom.” Harry described his neighborhood as middle-class, tract homes from the 1950’s

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<sup>128</sup> Interview with *Harry* at his church in New York on November 30, 2018.

and 1960's. He rode his bike everywhere, meeting friends throughout the connecting neighborhoods. The families who lived there were mostly white, with just a few African-Americans. The community was spilt, Catholic and Jewish. Harry's family was catholic, which was the dominant Christian denomination in the town. He went to mass every week until High School. Other than the traditional CCD classes and Confirmation, Harry and his family did not participate in any other ministries in the church. When Harry entered high school, he and his family drifted from the parish. After graduating from a local university with a major in voice performance, he was hired as a bass soloist in a North Shore United Methodist Church, which eventually led him back into church life and later, into full-time pastoral ministry.

Harry first learned the term "white" to mean European American as he was growing up in middle school. He remembers noticing the players on the baseball team from the local boys' home were all black. Harry felt bad for them because "they did not have a family to take care of them." When he was a little older, Harry remembers many conversations about property values when the first black family moved into the neighborhood. A few years later, a few more black families moved in and their children began attending the local public schools.

When asked to describe differences between whites and people of color, Harry began by saying it is easier for whites to get ahead than for blacks. People who are white achieve more success financially and have more opportunities than others. Then his description began to change. He focused on how people treat one another to get ahead. He declared that "my opinion does not matter as much as my colleagues of color. My opinion does not matter unless I agree with 100% of what they say." During conversations with people of color, Harry finds that he goes quiet. "If I share a different perspective, I am dismissed as giving a typical white male response." He does not comment as often as he would like or feels he should. Harry frequently experiences being "talked over." For example, as he tries to explain the concerns of his older parishioners regarding transgender bathrooms, Harry experiences being "shut down." In other conversations involving race, a black female colleague "jumps down his throat." He "does not want his voice minimized," so he does not share it with folks who seem hostile. He wants to be heard.

Harry thinks of justice in the way of Martin Luther King Jr. Justice is not just the absence of violence, but it is the presence of peace. Unfortunately, justice is meted out by the group that is in the “ruling power.” Real justice, according to Harry, includes establishing opportunities for everyone to live out, not just some. All people should be able and encouraged to use their God-given talents and to be treated equally. Harry spoke of a new ministry at their church called the “Blessing Box.” They created a structure on their property near the street where parishioners and others could deposit food for those in need. It was available for anyone to use and “more private” than going to a food pantry. Many people are “embarrassed” to use the local pantries. With the Blessing Box, they could come in the evening or overnight and take what they needed without others seeing them. To Harry, it seemed like a good idea and it was working.

But the residents of this wealthy, white, privileged neighborhood began to call and complain. They did not want “these kinds of people” coming to their town and coming through the residential areas for this kind of help. Their fear was that these people would bring crime, either stealing more or attracting other criminal activity to follow. To allay these fears, the church decided to move the box back a little further from the street but keep it in the front lawn. This ministry continues today and the complaints have lessened.

While Harry was in high school and college, he learned a great deal about “gay people.” As Harry said, especially in college, people tend to take their “mask” off and let others see the real person. Harry had not experienced or talked about homosexuality growing up. This was new to him. Harry describes himself as open, one who was taught to accept, not to judge. As he encountered LGBTQ people, Harry chose to listen, not to hate, and grew to be accepting. In fact, many of these people became his friends as they studied music together.

Abundant life to Harry means “shedding the chains, assumptions, and expectations of society.” This life includes developing deeper, more vulnerable relationships. It is important to know that no matter what, you are loved and forgiven by God. We need to let go of any guilt or shame. Abundant life means to live more joyfully, more openly. It is necessary to get past cultural wounds, to let down the walls, heal from past resentments and live with gratitude. Abundant life means relying on God, not other

people. Harry has evolved in his understanding of this phrase through the writing of Henri Nouwen, particularly in “Can You Drink the Cup?”<sup>129</sup> which emphasizes living in a vulnerable state. Our lives have spiritual, relational, and emotional components. According to Harry, abundant life is acknowledging and fulfilling each of these parts of our lives and others.

He goes on to say that right now, there are many, far too many, that are not experiencing abundant life. One cause is human greed. In our society, we continue to strive after the next best thing. We must have it. The media, advertisers, society, and even our friends can fuel this way of living. By going after these things, we spend time, money, and energy that could be provided to help others. Like the Rich Young Man in the Gospel of Luke,<sup>130</sup> we cannot find a way to live more simply; we do not trust God.

Harry believes it is difficult, if not impossible, for lower income families to experience abundant life. They may have a deep faith and connection to God, but constant suffering and worry about the lack of adequate food and clothing and the lack of access to health care is a constant drain and source of stress. We on the North Shore take these blessings for granted. We are “called to help others all throughout the Bible by God and Jesus.” But we must be careful not to come across as “the Great White Hope.” Instead, we need to join with other people to do the justice work to make life more equitable for everyone. We are called to take care of one another, to teach and serve each other. For those who have less, we are called to provide. Meeting the physical needs of the homeless through Midnight Run or Hurricane Sandy relief has been powerful for Harry. By listening with them and empowering them, people in need begin to experience hope. They begin to realize that someone cares. Teaching English lessons, providing homework help to children, and giving gifts through the Angel Tree program, are all ways Harry and his parishioners experience connection and offer abundant life to others.

Many of his parishioners are retired school teachers. They wanted to find a way to give back and make a difference. They wanted to “make an immediate impact” because other avenues are very difficult to work through. The congregation did not want to feel “beaten down or discouraged.” The Opioid Crisis was “too big to take on,” so the church

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<sup>129</sup> Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Can You Drink the Cup?* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 2006).

<sup>130</sup> Luke 18:18-23 (NRSV).

chose to provide tutoring and classes to connect to the local community to help empower and transform the lives of children and families. Harry plans to encourage his parishioners to reach out in more ways to help bring abundant life to the community. With that, the interview came to an end.

### **Joe**

Later that evening, I met with a man named *Joe*,<sup>131</sup> a married, father of two in his mid-40's from the same church as Harry. Joe has recently answered a call to full-time parish ministry. He is now serving as Assistant Pastor in the church and plans to begin studying at seminary in the fall. Joe grew up on a three-family farm in South Georgia that his father and uncle managed and began helping with the work as he grew older. He lived on the farm until he was fifteen. Joe had two brothers who both died as children and he has one older sister. His father was Primitive Baptist. He went on to mention that "They do not believe in the New Testament." His mother was Southern Baptist and her father was a minister. Joe described his family as faithful and religious, but not church-going.

"Growing up, I would say that we were fairly poor, like the other farm families in the area." But Joe stressed that there was always food on the table. He and his siblings wore "hand-me-downs." Together, they lived in an 800 sq. ft. home. Joe mentioned that all the other farm owners received government assistance to make ends meet, but his father and uncle refused to take this aid. They were too independent. Other farms are still there to this day, but when Joe was fifteen, the financial pressure began to be too much. Fortunately, at the same time the farm went into foreclosure, the family finished building a house on a plot of land they owned closer to town. After high school, he went into the Army, specializing in wireless communications. He has lived in California, Texas, Washington D.C., and now New York, currently working in a related, secular business.

Joe identifies as Caucasian but does not believe that there truly is a color "white" as it relates to race. He believes this term is a human-construct based on skin tone that only works to separate and divide. Joe stated that South Georgia is very racist. Growing up, he experienced this racism in a variety of ways. There were many black families who helped on the farm. Joe would play with their children all day long, but none of them, or

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<sup>131</sup> Interview with *Joe* at his church in New York on November 30, 2018.

their family members, were ever allowed in the house. His grandmother would make lunch for the whites inside and serve lunch to the blacks out back. This caused him to think that he and his family were somehow “better.” He noticed that whites may be poor, but they are far better off financially than blacks. For example, he understood that whites never needed food stamps and white families had their own vehicles.

Later in the conversation, Joe mentioned that “men were in charge of the family and the household.” Women were understood to complete the man. Many women worked at home on the farm in the kitchen, cooking, cleaning and helping with some chores. Joe also mentioned that the few people of Asian descent in South Georgia were not looked upon as lesser than whites. They were seen as “equally intelligent,” but “were not capable” of doing a hard, day’s work.

“The Army was the great equalizer,” Joe claimed. Everyone wore green. Everyone was treated the same. It was all one team; you succeeded and failed together, although the officer branches tended to have more whites. During his time in the Army, Joe thought things were getting better for everyone and that racism was subsiding, until he met a black officer that had just come from South Georgia who told him it was not getting any better. “Just go home for a few minutes and you will see.”

Following the Army, Joe noticed that there were very few people of color in the organizations where he worked. He theorized that the firms either only hired people like them or that people of color often were not qualified for his line of work. This led him to consider the lack of education and opportunity for people of color and the socio-economic differences that prevent them from pursuing sophisticated engineering degrees and professions. In South Georgia, all the good jobs went to white people. Whites would claim that the reason blacks needed food stamps is because they did not have good jobs. They needed to “try harder” and earn the qualifications and experience needed. But Joe noticed the opportunities were never available to them.

Growing up, the “N” word was used frequently in the house. Joe used the word himself until he went into the Army, and later in his life, he had to ask his father to stop using the word around he and his family when they visited. By encountering others, listening to them, and understanding their lives, Joe felt he changed in the Army and

gained a new understanding of people different from him. His white colleagues in the Army were split. Some were open to all and some were racist and never changed.

When asked to define justice, Joe said that justice happens “when all receive what is owed to them.” It is an action word. As a form of punishment, justice should be based solely on “what you did” and nothing else. His biggest influence for his understanding is Jesus. Jesus related to both sinners and saints. He treated everyone with the same dignity and respect, working to heal and empower everyone. Joe claimed that equality is more like a noun, meaning all should be treated the same in everything we do (on the same level). He mentioned that his understanding of this term is still evolving.

For Joe, the phrase abundant life means that a person has all they need to live, such as food, water, shelter, and education. They can stay warm in their homes and they are able to be happy. He clarified that happiness is not derived from material possessions, but from things unseen. Joe recognizes that large segments of the population are not experiencing abundant life. The poor, the homeless, the migrant workers in California who have become the modern-day African Americans of the 1800’s, live fifteen to twenty in a trailer with very little food. So many have no access to quality education. After the financial crisis of 2008, there were many who struggled, who lost everything. Joe laments that we, our nation, “did not learn anything.”

He goes on to describe a clear biblical mandate to help. Matthew 25 says we must serve the “least of these,” such as the poor, the elderly, the shut-ins, and the widows. Helping means not only giving \$10 to any cause. We must participate in their lives, become a part of their network and community. How can we understand others if we have never lived in a box or eaten soup from a soup kitchen? We must be in it with them, offering comfort, trying to understand who they are. There must be action to help them get out of their situation, since most of these people do want their circumstances to change. Joe went on to ponder, “Can we help them with education and skills? Is there a half-way house where they can get an address and someone to give them job experience?”

Currently, Joe is helping with stocking food pantries. Helping more than this is a time issue for him. Being a father, working, and serving in the church, does not leave any time to do more critical, systemic work. “We spend all of this time chasing things that

don't really make us happy." He and his wife are discerning how to downsize and sell off to offer resources to others. Joe is trying to follow the model of John Wesley to serve. He would like to engage ministries such as Heifer International and World Vision that help train recipients to be self-sufficient. He hopes to work to reform the justice system that is "terribly slanted against African Americans" and to change the "pipeline to prison" dilemma in our nation. Joe is hopeful that he can make a difference and looks forward to his life changing through his seminary experience and beyond. At that point, the interview ended.

### **John**

My final interview took place in a United Methodist Church about 25 miles away from Centerport in another region of the North Shore. There I met with *John*,<sup>132</sup> the pastor of a growing church in a residential community. He is a young man in his mid-30s, married, and the father of two young girls. John grew up in South Carolina, just outside Myrtle Beach. His grandfather was a tobacco farmer and his father worked as a heating and plumbing mechanic, who left high school to serve in the Army during the Vietnam war. After serving for two years, his father met his mother, who also had a father serving in the Army.

Growing up, John lived in a single-wide trailer with his older brother. When his sister came along, the family moved into a house that his father built. John grew up with his mother's former boss who was like an uncle for him. He taught John how to golf and shared a lot of wisdom about life. John's grandfather was a minister, but as he stated, "not a great guy." His other grandfather was an alcoholic. The family was not religious, never setting foot in a church until his sister was born. At that time, his mother brought the children to the United Methodist Church, since it was the closest. His father was not religious at all, but when his sister was born with multiple handicaps, he had a "religious experience." The minister spent a lot of time with him providing care and compassion for the whole family. His father's heart changed, and John always remembers this in his role as pastor today.

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<sup>132</sup> Interview with *John* at his church in New York on December 3, 2018.

John grew up in a small town, where most families worked on the nearby airbase. When the base closed in the 1990's, many families moved away, along with several businesses. The town itself was mainly poor, with wages in 2007 around \$7 per hour for most people. Hispanic families began moving into the trailer homes the white families used to live in. These Hispanic families stuck together because they "had to in order to survive."

The United Methodist Church grew a lot while John was young. There was Sunday School, worship, Wednesday night meal and Bible Study. There was not a lot of mission work at that time, but John did become a leader in the areas the church offered. He does remember one person doing work with Hispanic families, offering meals and English classes.

During the early part of his childhood, everyone around John was white, so he was not aware of difference. As people of color began to move into the region, John became aware of differences. He watched how white people treated African Americans and Native Americans nearby. He became aware of the privilege of being white as well. John could walk through a store and not worry that someone was following him. He himself witnessed a person of color shopping one day. After this man picked up gloves to purchase, he was followed everywhere else he went. As John was growing up, his father was approached by the KKK to join. His father refused, but the group is still nearby his hometown today.

John continued to share, discussing the current crisis at the border and the battle with undocumented immigrants. He stated that many people listen to and believe the rhetoric of the current administration, that these immigrants are dangerous, bringing drugs and crime with them. Others are "sliding," as John put it, meaning they disagree with this thought, but are not doing anything or even speaking against this.

John believes the country has split. White people continue to have more money, more homes, better job opportunities and education, and better healthcare. People of color experience a higher rate of homelessness and poverty. It is very difficult to rise out of poverty, yet many whites expect people of color to "rise above" their circumstances with hard work and patience. John is now preaching to his white congregation about white supremacy and justice. He encourages his parishioners to call the U.S.

Representative to make changes. He is trying to instill the message that it is not all about them. There are many others who need help, that God is calling his congregation to meet.

In the South as a young boy, Evangelical Christians tried to teach John that women were lesser than men, homosexuality is a sin, and whites were better than all other people of color. But watching his family love his sister, who was very different than anyone else around, taught him the powerful lesson that humanity is not all the same. God loves the difference in each of us and considers all people beautiful. Even if the community around him was not open, John remained open to new ideas and insights. He felt he was always “on the left” regarding social issues, even if that was unpopular. His family raised him to be open to all, showing love through actions. He had many women in his life who taught him to love in an open way, “more like Jesus.”

“Justice is explained by people who have more power working to support and help those who are being taken advantage of.” John tries to instill the need for his congregation to reach out to those who need help. He defines equality as everyone having the same. “Our nation has practiced exclusion for a long time, through voter registration, defining some as 3/5 of a person, calling other people savages, denying any justice to undocumented immigrants.” John commented that he is married to a legal immigrant who cannot vote.

He defines abundant life using Christ as the example. Jesus gave us the path to follow through his teachings. By living in a way that fulfills the call in Matthew 25, by serving the “least of these,” we fulfill Christ’s work. It is necessary to combine faith and action, to be engaged in community inside and outside the church walls. Writing checks to help in a crisis is good, but it is not enough. The goal is to get his church community to engage with those in need.

Currently, John is leading his congregation to provide abundant life in several ways. One way comes through the garden project the church initiated to grow fresh vegetables for several Hispanic families that live nearby. The church constructed several raised garden beds on the property to grow produce to give away. Many new people from around the community came to work in the garden and have become a part of the church. Another way is through preaching and worship. John has a monthly Social Justice

Sunday where he preaches about an “ill” in our society. “This has been revolutionary to some people in the church.” Overall, he says this has been well received.

John believes that there are many who are not living an abundant life. White men have been given a great deal of power and authority. Almost everyone else is experiencing some issue with justice, equality, or opportunity. Some groups deal with oppression more than others. The goal of the church is to help end these imbalances, to bring justice for all. John remembers the “Street Reach Mission” by the parishioner in his home church and works to embody that in some way here on the Island. After the Parkland school shooting last year, the congregation became very active in *March for our Lives* events and working with legislators on gun violence. Through *Mom’s Demand Action*, they tried to pressure local government at the county level for a “safe storage” act that would require all gunowners to store their guns in a safer manner. The town clergy association implemented *Laundry Love*, where clergy and parishioners would go to the local laundromat and pay for the cleaning. Most of the clientele is Hispanic families, and this gives the church the opportunity to meet new people, to listen and to develop relationships.

The point John emphasizes is to stay engaged. There needs to be a long-term course of action. That is the way to make change. If you do not engage, nothing changes, and that lack of action can backslide all the way to complacency. According to John, many white people are at this point today, believing things need to change, but remaining complacent, not engaging in the work. The key is meeting others, walking in their shoes, and developing relationships and empathy. “This work will compel you to action.” With that, the interview ended.

## CHAPTER 4

### EVALUATION AND LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

It was a blessing to listen and to learn with the Local Advisory Committee as well as the five men I interviewed. In many ways, their stories and experiences mirrored mine. These experiences helped to shape who they are now and how they see the world. All the participants know something is terribly wrong in our nation. They all see injustices that are overwhelming. They recognize the effects of white privilege, prejudice, and discrimination that become policies and practices, oppressive to many groups of people in our society. There were many similar understandings of what abundant life is and what our responsibility is to help people attain it, along with some important distinctions to note as well.

In this chapter, I will review the discussions, questions, and insights of the Local Advisory Committee following the videos and review of the project at various stages of development and implementation. I will also share and reflect on comments and learnings offered during the Site Visit. For the five men I interviewed, I will examine the beliefs, experiences, questions, and difficulties that surfaced during our time together. Throughout this chapter, I will offer my analysis of all these pieces of the project, weaving in sources that I used that have influences on my leadership of the discussion. Finally, I will look ahead to share how the project has impacted me and the next steps for our local church as we move toward abundant life for all.

As I shared my initial IRB documents with the LAC group, they were quick to move to the section with the interview questions. They wanted to know what I was asking and what I hoped to learn. I had submitted my first draft of the IRB documents, and was waiting to hear back from the IRB committee as we gathered for our second LAC meeting in November. The LAC was quick to point out the overall tone of the first draft of my questions. In fact, I had used language such as “If you believe this to be true, then...” That should have been my first clue that the questions were leading. But I didn’t

see it. I had learned so much in this degree, that a feeling of “*everyone needs to agree with my opinion*” came through. Thoughts such as “we are on a crusade to change the world. We don’t have time to waste. People need us. And we need to begin this process of change now,” were running in my head as I developed the initial list.

However, we are not the “Great White Hope,” as Harry mentioned, that should swoop in and fix everything. Setting the rules and telling others what they need to make their situations better, especially when we have not experienced the same life they have, is not helpful, and it can make things worse. White people have power in their privilege. But we cannot decide how to change things ourselves. We need to learn a new way. And it all begins by better understanding who we are.

The men interviewed all defined “white” based on skin tone and being of European descent. All agreed that whites were the dominant group in our society and being white comes with many privileges. Life is “safe” for white people and by working hard, usually you can “get ahead.” Joe implied white to be a human made category, a social construct. This is interesting. The “one drop rule” has been a long-standing policy of categorizing people. In societies that regard some races or ethnic groups of people as dominant or superior and others as subordinate or inferior, the term *hypodescent*<sup>133</sup> refers to the automatic assignment by the dominant culture of children of a mixed union or sexual relations between members of different socioeconomic groups or ethnic groups to the subordinate group. Using the hypodescent theory, someone with even 1/16 blood from a “lower class” lineage, would be considered that lower class. For example, even though President Barack Obama comes from mixed heritage, he is considered black. And this is “not something you would want.” Being black means you would be “followed in stores when making purchases, or that you would have to be very careful as KKK members may be watching and waiting for you,” as Joe mentioned. You wouldn’t have as much access to credit or loans, and you wouldn’t get job opportunities or scholarships for school as easily. Your road would be much more difficult.

Joe grew up on a farm in South Georgia. Even though many whites were poor, “they did not need food stamps.” However, statistics would say otherwise. In Appendix

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<sup>133</sup> Conrad Phillip Kottak, *Mirror for Humanity: A Concise Introduction to Cultural Anthropology* (McGraw-Hill: New York, 2009), 238.

6, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, in 2016, whites received the highest percentage of the total aid allotted, while blacks were under 25%, and other groups were even less.<sup>134</sup> Appendix 7 further reveals differences in the assumptions of groups who voted in the 2016 presidential election.<sup>135</sup> The chart shows that whites who voted for Trump assume a higher percentage of blacks receive federal assistance. Voters for Clinton assume more balance in assistance provided. Federal Assistance provided is actually much more in line with the Clinton Voters, if not a little more skewed towards white recipients.

Interestingly, Joe went on to describe how many farmers were receiving subsidy for government assistance. His tone seemed to suggest these forms of government assistance are very different. There seems to be a stigma around receiving food stamps versus some other kind of government aid. Are they really that different? Shannon Sullivan describes these thoughts in her book, *Good White People*. Since blacks in South Georgia did not own farms and could not receive a certain kind of aid, that is classified differently in the minds of whites. But receiving food stamps means “you are poor.” And that means you are just like black people. “White trash represent the threatening possibility that a white person could slide into blackness, which would mean for her to lose her racial status by means of losing her class status.”<sup>136</sup> In the end, Joe’s father lost the farm due to an even more heightened fear of taking any governmental aid.

In the north, in our current time, there are many families of color that are considered middle class. From these families, many are well educated and have good paying jobs. They live in nice homes and drive nice cars. They have “made it.” “Good white liberals tend to use the fact of black middle class (sometimes unconsciously, but other times explicitly and consciously) to affirm their belief that the basic structure of liberal society is just and fair.”<sup>137</sup> The thought goes that if blacks can make it, then whites

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<sup>134</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2016 Data, accessed February 15, 2019, <http://www.trivisonno.com/food-stamps-charts>.

<sup>135</sup> Arthur Delaney and Ariel Edwards-Levy, “Americans Are Mistaken About Who Gets Welfare,” Huffington Post Politics, February 5, 2018, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/americans-welfare-perceptions-survey\\_us\\_5a7880cde4b0d3df1d13f60b](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/americans-welfare-perceptions-survey_us_5a7880cde4b0d3df1d13f60b).

<sup>136</sup> Shannon Sullivan, *Good White People: The Problem with Middle-Class White Anti-Racism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2014), 39.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*, 41.

should make it too. No one should end up poor, like black families in the inner-city, in the projects. No one wants to end up like that.

This fear of being black is taught at a very early age. Bart remembered that black people did not live in nice neighborhoods, that teachers would make fun of them and pay much more attention to the white children in class. Bart also described his own stereotypes and that some work for good, since “there is truth in them.” One example he offered related to Asians. He stated, “For example, Asian Americans are more driven.” Another more general stereotype closely related to this one is “All Asian Americans are successful.” These stereotypes are pushed by whites to show that if you work hard enough, you can succeed. But behind the statement lies a terrible fact. “While some are successful, the hidden truths include the poverty of many Asian/Pacific Islander groups.” These rates range from 26% to 64% for different Asian American groups.<sup>138</sup> There are many other stereotypes for people of Asian descent. Asian American men have been portrayed through the media as weak, subordinate, and feminine. The “feminine” Dr. Fu Manchu is one such example. At the same time, Asian American women have often been shown as the embodiment of perfect womanhood and genuine exotic femininity.<sup>139</sup> These images of Asian men as asexual or homosexual and Asian women as sexual have combined racism and sexism to continue to support and drive white supremacy. Asian men are viewed as incapable of satisfying women. Therefore, “cast as sexually available, Asian women (can) become yet another possession of the white man.”<sup>140</sup>

Many of the men mentioned that as they were growing up, their family did not discuss much about race or women’s rights. Sexuality was certainly not a topic of conversation. What they learned, they mainly picked up from observation, from watching others “step in landmines” about what was accepted and how things worked. Harry felt sorry for the black youths from the boys’ home. As he grew older, he learned that property values went down when black families moved into the neighborhood. Joe was taught that women should be in the home, that they “complete the man.” All the good

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<sup>138</sup> Elizabeth Sutherland Martinez, “Seeing More than Black and White: Latinos, Racism, and the Cultural Divide,” *Indigenous People’s Literature*, June 8, 2004, <http://www.indigenouspeople.net/blackwht.htm>.

<sup>139</sup> Yen Le Espiritu, *Asian American Women and Men: Labor, Laws, and Love* (Alta Mira Press: New York, 2000), 112.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid*, 114.

jobs went to white people and he was further traumatized as his father used the “N” word constantly as it relates to black people. On the farm, when it came time for meals, whites ate inside, while blacks ate out back. John was taught that whites were better than anyone else, women were lesser than men, and LGBTQ people were sinners and deviants.

However, John did say that he had many good female role models that helped him become more open, “more like Jesus.” As a youth, he did not agree that other people were less than him. These women helped him understand that his thinking was not wrong. “When parents talk openly with their children about race, their children’s attitudes dramatically improve from a racial justice perspective.”<sup>141</sup> Parents, teachers, coaches, and mentors can all be good models for young people to learn and grow. I also think that anyone from the list above who talks with youth about any topic - race, class, gender, and sexual orientation just to name a few – would dramatically improve the child’s perspective and give them a baseline understanding to learn.

I note that most of us live what we are taught. For years, I understood Abraham Lincoln to be one of the greatest presidents in our nation’s history. He freed the slaves. He worked for the well-being of all. He never told a lie. But as Mark Charles detailed for us in “Our History and The Violence of White Supremacy,” Lincoln was neither as supportive of freeing the slaves as I had been taught, nor was he the “Great Emancipator” as had been described. As I showed this video to the LAC, the members, particularly the men, were not thrilled. While they said they understood the point Mark Charles was making within the first few minutes, the members felt they did not need to see Lincoln “shredded.”

In my analysis, I note Shannon Sullivan writes, “Given the inhumanity of white history, white people today thus can find it difficult, and even refuse to relate themselves to white racists of the past.”<sup>142</sup> Distancing themselves from their white forebears can seem to be the only responsible way for contemporary white people to (not) deal with their racist history. “It can seem to be the best way to demonstrate that they disapprove of slavery and that they are not racist like previous white generations.”<sup>143</sup> The problem for

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<sup>141</sup> Sullivan, 97.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

the LAC (and me) is that distancing our hearts from the image we have of Lincoln is not easy to do. As one of the most revered presidents, it would be difficult explaining to our friends and colleagues why we don't think Lincoln was as full of good will as a president as they might think. People would want an explanation, and it takes a good amount of information to walk someone through the letters and articles to show Lincoln's train of thought. It also takes courage to go against the tide of public opinion. There are other examples of difficult conversations that can help people understand the complexities of these issues and the importance of locating any political and power dynamics involved.

George shared some interesting insights on unintended symbolism, noticing that the murals displayed in the sanctuary of the church often show Jesus as a white man with light brown hair and blue eyes. What does this say about who Jesus is? Who God is? Are we saying to be more Christ-like a person needs to be more white? In addition, there is an American flag in the back of the sanctuary. He asks, "Why? What does this mean? What is the intent? Why does nationalism need to come into a place of worship?" Good questions. I understand a flag to be a symbol, which in part, represents the ideology of a nation. When a flag is flown, it is in a way, celebrating that ideology. When raised in a sanctuary, it can be implied that this ideology is God-like and not to be challenged. However, with all the problems outlined, parts of our nation's ideology should not be equated with God.

George went on to the topic of Colin Kaepernick, a former NFL quarterback that started a national controversy when he and others knelt for the national anthem at a game. He did this in protest over the recent police shootings of unarmed black men and other injustices faced every day by people of color. George did not understand how kneeling in silent protest over these injustices, could be interpreted as an insult to our troops and veterans. Many whites were "offended" by the disruptive actions of Kaepernick and other NFL players who expressed their beliefs in this way. And of course the media played this controversy up. John Wilson-Hartgrove states "We have to want to see... [W]hen we love in public, it looks like disruption."<sup>144</sup> Kaepernick won a non-disclosed settlement

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<sup>144</sup> Jonathon Wilson-Hartgrove, *Reconstructing the Gospel: Finding Freedom from Slaveholder Religion* (Westmont, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2018), 55, 103.

from the NFL after teams unofficially blacklisted him from playing.<sup>145</sup> Yet in his home state, “Republicans lawmakers in Wisconsin successfully pushed to erase Colin Kaepernick from a state celebration for Black History Month.... State Assembly Majority Leader Jim Steineke said Republicans would not support Kaepernick’s inclusion for “obvious reasons,” deeming the athlete too polarizing.”<sup>146</sup>

I believe our history is not complete without a discussion, to be blunt, that includes getting rid of people who were already here, stealing people and bringing them here against their will, living with laws designed to push people backward, and if they step out of line, put them in a legal system that places them in a pipeline to prison, or worse yet, disposes of them. This isn’t love. Silence of too many white people is killing people. Justice work is needed. But I believe before justice work begins, there is another step needed - forgiveness.

### **Forgiveness**

Margaret Farley notes that forgiveness is active and is to be understood as “the decision to ‘let go’ of something within one’s self, and to ‘accept’ anew the one by whom we have been harmed.”<sup>147</sup> For people of color, I can only imagine what it must be like for a white man, like me, to ask for forgiveness. Given the everyday, perpetual harm institutional and individual racism inflicts on these children of God, asking for forgiveness is difficult. Yet, love is born again from forgiveness and depending on your perspective, forgiveness and the need for it, will look different.

Farley talks about the concept of *anticipatory forgiveness*. “Anticipatory forgiveness does not mean blinding oneself to the evil that is done...passively acquiescing to the perpetrator...or failing to protect victims.... It does mean being ready to accept the injurer...waiting until the time that the enemy may yet become a friend.”<sup>148</sup> Serving in my community, as I reach out to new communities, hoping to listen and learn new ways to

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<sup>145</sup> Jemele Hill, “Kaepernick Won. The NFL Lost,” *The Atlantic*, February 17, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/02/colin-kaepernick-won-his-settlement-nfl/582994/>.

<sup>146</sup> Char Adams, “White Wisconsin Republicans Force Colin Kaepernick’s Name to Be Scrapped from Black History Month Celebration,” *People*, February 15, 2019, <https://people.com/politics/colin-kaepernick-republicans-black-history-month/>.

<sup>147</sup> Margaret A. Farley, “Forgiveness in the Service of Love,” in *Love and Christian Ethics: Tradition, Theory and society*, ed. Frederick V. Simmons with Brian C. Sorrells (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2016), 167.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

love, I pray for this anticipatory forgiveness from our brothers and sisters. By asking for forgiveness and intentionally making a change to promote the overall well-being of everyone, love will grow. I may make new friends and all of us may live more abundantly.

At our Annual Conference gatherings, we have openly asked for forgiveness and repented to the Shinnecock Nation, the Native People whose land on which we live, serve, and meet. Each year, a tribal leader comes to take part in the opening service. Although asking for forgiveness and permission is powerful, repentance implies that the offender will make a change. Important questions remain: Will there be any reparations for the harm done? Will we ask different groups for forgiveness who have been harmed? When will we take the next step? As Wilson-Hartgrove states, “We have to want to see.”<sup>149</sup> And we must make a change in the way we live.

### **Listening**

Next, we must listen. Wilson-Hartgrove refers to this as “Porch-Sitting.”<sup>150</sup> All men interviewed and all members of the LAC stressed the importance of listening. We must learn. We must get out of our comfort zones and go to places we normally would not go and meet people *where they are*. In *Revealing Whiteness*, Shannon Sullivan shares thoughts on changing our habits. “The key to transformation is to find a way of disrupting a habit through environmental change and then hope that the changed environment will help produce an improved habit in its place.”<sup>151</sup> We must join *with*, in as many ways as we can. We must let people who are not in positions of power change the way we understand history, tell their stories, and develop relationships with them. Traveling off our privileged peninsula into the communities where we can partner is crucial. In *Healing Our Broken Humanity*, we hear the importance of opening to one another, pulling “the fragments” together, joining at the Banquet Table, talking and eating at the same place.

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<sup>149</sup> Wilson-Hartgrove, 55.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid*, 74.

<sup>151</sup> Shannon Sullivan, *Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), 9.

And it is up to the church to open the minds of the people and society, to educate and then act.<sup>152</sup>

Listening involves an active waiting that allows new information in, is prepared to be surprised, remains open to the illumination of the Spirit. Questioning is a corrective to complacency – the danger of becoming satisfied with old answers and preconceptions. We subject our own answers of yesterday to fresh questioning in order to embrace new situations and new insights. The aim of listening is receptivity; the aim of questioning is honesty.... The ultimate goal of the process is the maturing of our theological understanding.<sup>153</sup>

One interesting comment came from Harry. He discussed actively listening with LGBTQ friends, learning, growing, and eventually becoming accepting. However, when it came to race, he shared difficulties in past conversations. Feeling like he was being dismissed and talked over, Harry became more silent with his colleagues on this topic. I can relate. When I was taking the course, Religion and the Social Process for my Master of Divinity degree fifteen years ago, I fell silent. It was painful to learn the depths of oppression others felt, and that mostly white people, men in particular, were in power, setting the rules, discriminating. I needed to learn. I needed to listen. As Wilson-Hartgrove puts it, to “unlearn whiteness,” the best thing for me to do was to “just shut up and listen.”<sup>154</sup>

Emilie Townes describes love as “Justice...which is the corporate and communal expression of love – our concrete acts to create and broaden spaces in society for human flourishing and creation mending.”<sup>155</sup> Love is “Koinonia – love in the mutuality of community, in the sharing of the common life in covenant and commitment.”<sup>156</sup> This comes through seeing ALL people, listening deeply to their stories, sharing with others, actively working with and encouraging new friends to provide ideas to “Do Justice,” bringing a new way of thinking and being together in the world. Jacqui Lewis and John Janka provide the challenge in *The Pentecost Paradigm*. “Without active engagement

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<sup>152</sup> “Healing Our Broken Humanity: A Seven-Session Film Series on Race Justice, and Reconciliation,” The Global Church Project, Sept. 17, 2017, <https://theglobalchurchproject.com/video/healing-humanity/>.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Wilson-Hartgrove, 164.

<sup>155</sup> Emilie M. Townes, “Meditations on Love and Violence,” in *Love and Christian Ethics: Tradition, Theory and Society*, ed. Frederick V. Simmons with Brian C. Sorrels (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2016), 303.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

with the larger community and a willingness to put oneself in the public square, advocating for those without a voice, the children, the poor, the hungry, and the left out – without such activism, the witness of the faith community will be greatly diminished.”<sup>157</sup>

At the Revolutionary Love Conference, it was amazing to learn of the work Genesis Be is leading on *listening and relationships*. In 2016, she captivated America with a bold, theatric protest against the Mississippi State Flag that went viral. She is making a real difference through perspective and dialogue. As a black, lesbian artist and activist, she defines her social justice work with the term *conceptual resistance*, which she describes as “the exercise of challenging one’s own sense of reality, thus enhancing the ability to see an object or event from multiple perspectives simultaneously, or to imagine objects or events that exist outside our mundane understandings of time and space.”<sup>158</sup> She is intentionally working with her white supremacist “enemies” by setting up one-on-one dialogues, listening to the anger and fear shared at the table, sharing her story, and telling her truth. As we saw, it is working. She leaves her home, her place of belonging and comfort, and goes to a place (her home state) she knows is “hostile” toward her beliefs and lifestyle. She listens to the “deep stories” of the people, and is changing hearts, transforming *enemies* into *allies* one conversation at a time.

These deep stories are at the heart of each individual, each community. Arlie Hochschild defines a deep story as “a story that feels as if it is true.” It is a narrative that underlies the lives of people and connects with their core feelings.<sup>159</sup> The deep story that emerged in Hochschild’s narrative for the people of Southwest Louisiana was of *a line of people on their way to the Promised Land* (or the American Dream) which was *just over the hill*, the reward for their patience and hard work.<sup>160</sup> Listening to the deep stories of people is critical; it is the basis for one’s beliefs and a way one loves in public (or not). Unfortunately, as we have witnessed, many of us are not listening, not trying to encounter

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<sup>157</sup> Jacqueline J. Lewis and John Janka, *The Pentecost Paradigm: Ten Strategies for Becoming a Multiracial Congregation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2018), 48.

<sup>158</sup> Genesis Be presentation “*Movement Building at the Intersections of Race, Gender, and Sexuality*” at the Revolutionary Love Conference, Middle Collegiate Church, NY, April 8, 2018.

<sup>159</sup> Arlie Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* (New York: The New Press, 2016), 16.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

anyone else, making assumptions about whole groups of people without ever getting to know them.

We have seen this lack of listening work in evil ways, between whites and blacks, even decades after the Civil Rights Movement. The shooting of Jordan Davis by Michael Dunn is just one such example. “Loud music,” a black youth, and a white man with a gun led to disaster.<sup>161</sup> Through the initial days following the shooting, Michael’s story to the police changed at least three times. The story the other black youth in the car told did not waiver. Michael changed the facts in his mind, he *disremembered*, to save himself. I ask myself “How can people be so cruel?” People are not exactly the same; they are different; but all people are gifts from God. Then, I look in the mirror and realize, I have not always been open. I have not listened. I too, have judged entire groups of people without getting to know them. I have not always offered abundant life.

By the same token, we can judge our own peers and colleagues in a way that assumes they will not be open to a new perspective. This limits their ability to learn and grow, while at the same time, stifling community and relationship building. This can be done in a variety of ways. As mentioned earlier, Harry withholds his experiences and opinions from his colleagues of color, since they “interrupt him and talk over him.” We can withhold our understandings and opinions for fear that we may be ostracized as mentioned by the LAC Committee when presented with a new perspective on Abraham Lincoln. We can also choose to not engage with others because we do not want to alienate them. After reviewing the video by Valerie Kaur, *The Call to Revolutionary Love*, the committee members responded well to the information presented, even wanting Kaur to come speak at our church. However, they wanted to edit out the parts where Kaur criticized President Trump and his words, actions, and policies. But Wilson-Hartgrove points out that Jesus was not about keeping the status quo. There is risk in the work for justice. Courageous Leadership means we need to discern when to “shut up and listen,” and when to speak and share, particularly as white people. Jesus’ ministry and teachings were about reconstructing the Gospel. And this didn’t always go smoothly. “Interrupting religion’s tendency to turn against itself, whenever we are willing to stop and listen –

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<sup>161</sup> *3 1/2 Minutes 10 Bullets*, Marc Silver, dir. (2015). <http://www.takepart.com/three-and-a-half-minutes-ten-bullets>.

whenever we open ourselves to hear the stories we think we know, from a different perspective, there is a possibility that something revolutionary will happen.”<sup>162</sup>

At each New York Annual Conference meeting, our Bishop asks the clergy to gather on the stage during the reading of the appointments. One district at a time, he tells us, “I do not appoint you only to a church, I appoint you to a community. Go and serve.” During his first Annual Conference session with us, he challenged us to minister to the people - ALL the people. However, our denominational structure is set to “reward” clergy who care for the people already in the walls of the building. Regardless, the call of Christ compels us to *chaplancy* in the community, to meet them where they are. Winifred Fallers Sullivan explains in *The Ministry of Presence* that there is a tension that exists between “a presence that leads to trust and an ongoing need to account to yourself, your religious masters, and the institution that employs you – as to the value of what you do – a tension that makes politics difficult.”<sup>163</sup> It is not clear if the focus is on meeting new people or on caring for the people already in the church. If the focus really is on the community, the denomination needs to reconsider the measurements of effectiveness and healthy churches it has in place to match this mindset.

Another confusion with the Bishop’s statement is that the term *community* needs to be more clearly defined. Within three miles in any direction of Centerport, there is another United Methodist Church. The unwritten assumption is that we will be ministering in our designated areas and not crossing into “another territory.” No “sheep stealing.” But if we do not go beyond the bounds of our defined community, we will not encounter anyone different from us. We will only meet people with similar stories, similar problems, similar goals. We will miss hearing the deep stories of people who have entirely different experiences, those who live on the margins of society, those who may not have a home, who are chronically ill, who cannot find work, who are working two jobs and still not able to make ends meet, those who experience violence on a regular basis.

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<sup>162</sup> Wilson-Hartgrove, 39.

<sup>163</sup> Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, *A Ministry of Presence: Chaplaincy, Spiritual Care, and the Law* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 189.

In 2017, Mandisa released a song called “We All Bleed the Same.”<sup>164</sup> The lyrics were written following several shootings of unarmed black men, the march on Charlottesville, and the sense of division in our nation that came to light. Mandisa states,

My heart was broken at the state of our country. I felt like we were all fighting against one another. We just couldn’t get along. I realized we had the answer and that’s in 2 Chronicles 7:15 which says, “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sins and will heal their land.” We are never going to find healing for our land by yelling and screaming at one another. We’re not gonna find it by fighting one another. The only way that we can do that is by coming together, by realizing that we may look different on the outside, but we all bleed the same on the inside. Let’s celebrate our differences, but let’s realize that the one thing that unites us and brings us together is the blood of Jesus.<sup>165</sup>

Mandisa wonders when the time will come when judging by someone’s color, the clothes they wear, or any other means like these will come to an end. We need to realize that we are all the same on the inside, trying to make sense of life, trying to live, trying to find the light. “Only love can drive out all the darkness. What are we fighting for? We were made to carry one another, we were made for more.” This line rings in my head as I think of Eric Gardner and so many other young black men shot and killed by police officers. I think of all those who watched white men march through Charlottesville, VA with torches lit and chanting hate speech. I think of those living in poverty, those in my denomination who feel they are not welcome and abandoned. I think of women, working harder and harder to keep their families going, wearing themselves out for less pay, struggling for respect and recognition for their hard work and sacrifices. All these people and more *need to breathe*. They need to experience the fullness and blessings of God that comes from abundant life.

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<sup>164</sup> See Appendix 8 for the full lyrics to this song.

<sup>165</sup> FreeCCMAbby, *Christian News*, October 10, 2017, <http://freeccm.com/2017/10/10/behind-the-song-mandisa-shares-the-heart-behind-her-single-bleed-the-same-feat-tobymac-kirk-franklin/>.

### **Abundant Life**

When it came to define abundant life, many of the interviewees and the LAC used the scripture from Matthew 25.<sup>166</sup> In fact, in the sanctuary of our church, there is beautiful stained glass depicting this Scripture on the wall directly over the altar table. Everyone agreed that serving the “least of these” is critical for all to have abundant life. Helping others achieve a full spiritual life is also important, not only keeping them physically alive, but helping them to thrive. George outlined the importance of the spiritual and the material. Joe described it as everyone having what they need.

Bart believes that providing material needs can actually help people grow spiritually through renewed hope. He spoke about different ways he served that brought transformation to people in need. He recalled the homeless he served through HIHI, Midnight Run (serving the homeless in New York City at various stops in one night), the Food Panty, and those he served on mission trips to help restore homes for people who couldn’t afford it. Although this service does in fact help those in need, I question the depth of the transformation for those served. As the van pulls away and the homeless in New York City go back to their “box,” or the homeless in Huntington go back to their tents, has there been systemic change? Is there abundant life available for them – life continuing in tangible ways in mind, body, and spirit?

Joseph Kuhn of Religious News Service describes “Toxic Charity.”<sup>167</sup> Appendix 9 shows a redacted summary of questions and answers regarding charity work. Kuhn states there is danger in “one-way giving.” This can lead to “pitying the poor,” customers’ growing dependence on the aid, rules laid out that some seek to circumvent causing friction, and the feel-good effect for those who serve. He suggests that charity be limited to emergency situations. I would like to slightly caution Kuhn’s statement. It is not always clear for someone outside a situation to know what constitutes an “emergency” for someone else. I understand and agree with his point. But if I were to err, I would want to err on the side of “generosity” to prevent potential catastrophe. In some cases, generosity may be better than nothing.

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<sup>166</sup> Matthew 25:31-44 (NRSV).

<sup>167</sup> Josef Kuhn, “Urban Activist and Author Relates Problems with Charity Work,” *Huffington Post*, December 12, 2011, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/10/12/robert-lupton-toxic-charity\\_n\\_1007751.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/10/12/robert-lupton-toxic-charity_n_1007751.html).

Harry provided an interesting definition of abundant life. He describes it as “shedding the chains, assumptions, and expectations of society.” This life includes developing deeper, more vulnerable relationships. It is important to know that no matter what, you are loved and forgiven by God. We need to let go of any guilt or shame. abundant life means to live more joyfully, more openly. This is a different look at the phrase. To me, this is what I need for abundant life. As a white male, isolated with my understanding and thoughts, I am oblivious to the plight of others. But once I “see” more of the effects of centuries of oppression so many people face, this particular definition becomes more of what I personally need. John carries the definition even further, combining a justice and equality element. By following Matthew 25, we need people who currently have more power working for those that don’t. For white people, this means, we must combine our faith and our action to help abundant life become a reality for anyone in need, allowing them to lead and not providing answers for them.

John described it as engaging those in need, “walking in their shoes.” This leads to empathy, which leads to deeper connection and more opportunity for justice work. Without engagement, without listening, without getting out of our comfort zone and taking a risk, Abundant Life will not happen. “You have to risk something...nothing you can do is going to change the world...but you will change...your public action will compel every person who knows you and loves you to reconsider how whiteness has taught them to imagine the world.”<sup>168</sup>

### **Site Visit Summary**

The Site Visit went well. I was pleased to hear the insights and connections the LAC members made through the discussions and presentations. Their excitement for the future was palpable and it infused me with energy and focus. Here is a summary of what they shared:

- “The idea of working as a team on a strategy for what to do next is powerful. Together we will learn what to do.”
- “We have learned to go past the symptoms of an issue. We need to look at and deal with the root cause of any injustice.”

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<sup>168</sup> Wilson-Hartgrove, 169.

- “Learning to step outside our comfort zone and get out of this bubble is needed. I want to become a Courageous Leader.”
- “It will be exciting to join with experts already in action.”
- “We will not assume everyone knows about each injustice. We need to teach, plan, engage, and act.”
- I have learned that I can be complacent, even when actively involved in justice ministries (taking the easy route – working on administrative matters, missing meetings and deadlines and “not keeping up with what is going on.”)

This team has helped me understand much more about what is needed from me in my leadership. It is very exciting to know that they want to keep going. They are glad they spent time learning about the need for systemic work, but now they want to learn more. They are ready to listen and they want to engage. They are very disappointed in the state of our nation today. The visual from the video of Sister Simone is still weighing heavy on their minds and hearts. Remembering the call of Jesus, to make sure others experience abundant life, is the point of love. Ignoring this call is not only unethical, it is damaging to the Body and Soul of Christ, and to all of us.

Serving in a wealthier, white, suburban church, with the beaches, big homes, and fancy cars, may seem to some like “living the American Dream.” But what is this dream? On what assumptions is this dream built? Who has the opportunity and means to pursue this dream? Are we pursuing God’s dream or some fantasy we have created in our minds, bought into by society? Listening to the media and living deeper into social media, we have allowed the process of disremembering to strengthen. We have lost the gift of community. Our work needs to represent a more *interconnected circle* of people and communities, rather than a line going up over a hill, where some get pushed back so far, they can’t see where they need to go. Today, in this interconnected web of society, people are suffering for a variety of reasons. We as a white privileged community, have the responsibility to do something. And part of that responsibility is working for more just laws for people who are disadvantaged.

“Any salvation you claim has to be interwoven for all (available for all) ... White people must come to anti-racism work for our own salvation.”<sup>169</sup> (I would add any

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<sup>169</sup> Traci Blackmon, RLC, April 6, 2018.

systemic justice work) That is a game-changer. Eternal life is not just about personal salvation, as has been emphasized by the West for the longest time. It is about salvation for all, communal, together. If our salvation is interwoven with those in other communities, not just the “stressed out” Top 5%, but with those in all economic strata, races, genders, sexual orientations, etc., then this is our faith imperative. We must get out and work with other leaders and communities to bring change, to bring love, to bring abundant life.

Rev. Dr. William Barber connects these thoughts in a powerful way. Discussing the common goals between several movements such as Voting Rights, the MeToo Movement, LGBTQ equality groups, and the environmental agencies pushing for legislation to combat climate change (to name a few), Dr. Barber presents the need for a *Third Reconstruction*. “Within the framework of a Third Reconstruction, we see how all of our movements are flowing together, recognizing that our intersectionality creates the opportunity to fundamentally redirect America.”<sup>170</sup> Rev. Barber continues, offering thoughts on who needs to lead and have voice. “When you want a Revolutionary Resurrection, Mary Magdalene has to come first. Those that are rejected, despised, demonized, and dehumanized have to lead, they have to come first.”<sup>171</sup> But the “Mary Magdalenes” cannot change society alone. Those who are privileged need to use their power to support justice and freedom for all, working with those who are not in power.

Glaude makes a similar case. “If we are going to change how we see black people, white people - and only white people can do this - will have to kill the idea of white people.”<sup>172</sup> This requires a shift from a “thing-oriented society” to a “people-oriented society.”<sup>173</sup> Many white men seem so attached to their lifestyles and comfortable with the way things are, including current leadership, that a grassroots level of systemic change in thought and action will need to evolve to transform values and greatly reduce, hopefully eliminate, the “value gap.” How do I continue to network throughout the “white

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<sup>170</sup> Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II with Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *The Third Reconstruction: How a Moral Movement is Overcoming the Politics of Division and Fear* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2016), 122.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Glaude, 201.

<sup>173</sup> Glaude, 206.

community" to change the way we think/live? One way would be to follow the Genesis Be model of "one-at-a-time" conversation.

Miguel De La Torre uses the term *koinonia*, in step 3 of the hermeneutical circle of ethics. Being *in community with* the marginalized, listening to *their* stories, and *working in solidarity* with them in their struggle towards full liberation is required.<sup>174</sup> This helps me to understand that we do not want to superimpose our solutions on to anyone. This has been part of the problem all along. Whites have tried to “help” with their ideas. But each community needs their own voice and leadership to develop the best strategies for change. This interaction also builds relationships.

Melissa Snarr makes some powerful insights on community. Through organizing, she claims that a “commitment to justice shared with fellow citizens can transform an unjust law.”<sup>175</sup> It is critical for leaders to listen to the stories of the people, their real-life struggles, to become aware of injustices and how to direct a group’s efforts. Face-to-face sessions are essential in leadership. Organizing people to build relationships is key. Snarr goes on to say that it is in the organizing itself where “virtue is instilled; it is not based on outcomes.”<sup>176</sup>

I know that many great ideas for ministry come right from my home. I am blessed to have a partner, my wife, who is creative, empathetic, and sees the world from a different point of view. Her whole vocation is serving and being in community with the marginalized, those with special needs or those who have experienced a traumatic brain injury. Powerful ideas for Christian Praxis come right out of kitchens, churches, schools, etc.... Where two or three (or more) are gathered...Jesus is there. People who live within a specific context, those living in the margins, are very intelligent people. They know what needs to change and very often have the best ideas for how to change them. “Outsiders” coming to “help” need to recognize and value the vast wealth of knowledge, experience, and resources already in place.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Miguel De La Torre. *Doing Christian Ethics from the Margins* (Orbis Books: Maryknoll, NY, 2000), 64.

<sup>175</sup> Melissa C. Snarr, *All You That Labor: Religion and Ethics in the Living Wage Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 112.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>177</sup> Vincent Lloyd, “Organizing Race: Taking Race Seriously in Faith-Based Community Organizing,” *Journal of Religion Ethics* (October 16, 2014): 650.

There is a difference to be celebrated in all traditions. Difference is good. Just look at the world, the countless species, flowers, the complexities of life systems, and the beauty in all people. God created difference to be celebrated, not assimilated. When will we begin to celebrate the diversity God has given us? Race does matter. Gender matters. The vast array of difference we have been blessed with on Earth is to be valued and honored. The way we participate in organizing matters, particularly coming from a white-dominant culture. As Vincent Lloyd puts it, “we do not need to have a seat for everyone at the current table, we need a new sort of table.”<sup>178</sup>

What does love in public look like? Seeing ALL people, listening deeply to their stories, sharing with others, actively working with others and letting others lead to “Do Justice,” bringing a new way of thinking and being together in the world to bring abundant life to all. I must work to learn and know the truth, to retell history, to help with others to dismantle systems of oppression and injustice, and to claim common ground.

### **Where Do We Go from Here?**

Over the last few years, we have seen many leadership changes at CUMC. Youth now have voice and vote at the church council table. By initiating one-on-one and small group conversations, I have already been teaching the importance of doing justice. In my preaching this past year, I introduced *communal salvation*. The church is now further discerning their call, developing new ideas, and listening to one another.

We need to get out there and meet new people, different from us. As John put it, we need to “walk in their shoes.” Once that happens, we will better understand why someone’s life is the way it is. To help us, we plan to call on John Janka from Middle Church and have him come to consult with us to help us develop a strategy for our suburban church. We hope to connect with our sister community in Huntington Station, where there is a significant Hispanic homeless population of mostly undocumented immigrants. The New York Annual Conference has a new director for JFON (Justice for Our Neighbors) that provides legal aid, advice, and processing for anyone seeking refuge. The director happens to be a friend of mine which will make it easier to coordinate and

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 653.

set up training for our church. This team will help educate us on the issues facing immigrants and how to help drive meaningful immigration reform.

We have made important decisions together, such as becoming a “sanctuary church,” standing against ICE and inhumane immigration policies. We are planning to install showers so a person or family in crisis for deportation could stay longer than just a few hours. In addition, our church is now working with a newly formed group called LIICAH (Long Island Inclusive Communities Against Hate) to bring communities together to stand united against all forms of hate. Most recently, one of our parishioners represented our church at a rally to protest the separation of children in the immigrant crisis along our Southern Border.

CUMC is now also working with the Opioid Crisis Teams across the Island, developing strategies with legislators, medical experts, and religious leaders to prevent deaths to stop this terrible disease. In addition, in April, we plan to have a representative from *Family Service League* share opportunities for ministry during our worship service. This organization is a “go-to” for so many resources to help people in our community with various needs.

Since the onset of Family Service League, our mission has been to maintain and strengthen the family structure throughout the communities we serve...Our valued programs help and serve over 50,000 people annually. FSL delivers tangible help and crisis intervention across a wide range of service areas including mental illness, drug and alcohol addiction, homelessness, job training, computer literacy, trauma counseling, at-risk youth, and family and senior citizen support services. Additionally, FSL operates pre-school learning centers, Universal Pre-K programs, recreational camping, and Suffolk County’s only Community School. All told... FSL operates more than 60 programs at over 21 locations throughout Suffolk County.<sup>179</sup>

The HIHI organization mentioned earlier is part of the Family Service League. During one of the overnights hosted at our church this season, a guest asked if our church could offer him a job. This young man is currently undocumented. The encounter led to a conversation with our leadership team where we discussed the need to find out how best to help someone like this. We look forward to learning more about the ways we can join with other agencies in town already working for justice, opportunity, and equality for all.

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<sup>179</sup> Program Information from Family Service League of Huntington, NY, accessed March 11, 2019, <http://www.fsl-li.org/programs-services/>.

We have also begun working with our town and community on advancing the Equality Act<sup>180</sup> to support equal and full rights for LGBTQ individuals and their families. Following the Special Session of the General Conference, our Bishop called a Special Session of the Annual Conference to discuss the outcomes and expectations of the General Conference. It was heartwarming to hear the Bishop take a stand with the LGBTQ community, out loud, and to say that not only will he “stand with” this group, but that he will also fully support and protect them along with allies who lead ministries of full inclusion, even at his own personal risk. Our New York Annual Conference has long affirmed and supported this beloved community. Having our Bishop show “love in public” was a special moment for many of us.

At this Special Annual Conference, a statement was offered that covers many topics, not just human sexuality and gender identity. Appendix 10 provides the full text. Although many agreed with the statement in its entirety, not everyone did. Many did not like the tone it set in an already delicate situation. Several delegates, clergy, and parishioners were “caught off guard,” surprised by the breadth and depth of these statements. For some, this was a “polarizing move” on the part of the Conference that took advantage of one topic and broadened the “beliefs for all” in one moment. There was a link sent out to sign the petition in support of these beliefs. It is up to each individual to sign or not. It is not clear what will come of this statement in the future. There was no motion to adopt it in any way. It was simply read aloud with passion.

Still, the affirmation of the LGBTQ community is included and affirmed within the statement. Our local church has responded by taking an official vote to discover whether we are a church that fully affirms LGBTQ people or a church that aligns with the Traditional Plan. At the time of this writing, the results of the vote are still pending. The LAC, our church leaders, and I all believe that our church will become a fully affirming church. We look forward to sharing with our community who we are and that are sign that says “All Welcome” really means all people are welcome. And beyond being welcome, we look forward to celebrating life events, including marriage, as well as

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<sup>180</sup> A movement has begun on Long Island to work with the legislature to bring full equality for people in the LGBTQIA community, accessed March 11, 2019, <https://www.hrc.org/resources/the-equality-act>.

celebrating the calls God has placed on every heart, even to Licensed and Ordained Ministry in the church.

There is quite a bit on the horizon. The work is exciting and bringing new energy into the church. Change is happening. As my leaders are beginning to step up, I ask myself, “Am I ready? Am I willing to go “all in?” What will I/we have to change? Where will this take us? What is the cost?” Now, I will have to find a new way to lead. The good news is that I am not alone.

My own personal goal during and following this project is to continue to become a more courageous leader, willing to risks and make mistakes. I do not want to look back and view my leadership as “safe.” Brene Brown defines transformative leadership in *Daring Greatly*. She claims that nothing should feel as “uncomfortable, dangerous, or hurtful” as looking back “and wondering what it would be like if I had the courage to show up and let myself be seen.”<sup>181</sup>

Speaking one-on-one and in small groups, I am finding people who want to *do* something, not just talk. New people are coming into our church and joining our ministries for change, even in the chaos of the current United Methodist Church. There will be some who will not want to work with us. But we must persist. As Delle McCormick advises, “look for windows and doors; don’t always try to break down walls.”<sup>182</sup> By developing relationships with different people, we will listen, learn, and “see.” There is Hope.

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<sup>181</sup> Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent and Lead* (New York, NY: Gotham Books, 2012), 249.

<sup>182</sup> Rev. Dr. Delle McCormick (lecture, Drew University, Madison, NJ, August 2, 2018).

# APPENDIX 1

## Cycle of Socialization



From book: Readings for Diversity and Social Justice By Maurianne Adams.

## APPENDIX 2

### **Praying for Time – by George Michael (1990)**

Do you think we have time? Do you think we have time?...

These are the days of the open hand. They will not be the last.  
Look around you. These are the days of the beggars and the choosers.  
This is the year of the hungry man, whose place is in the past,  
Hand in hand with ignorance and legitimate excuses

The rich declare themselves poor, when most of us are not sure  
If we have too much, but we'll take our chances  
Because God's stopped keeping score.  
I guess somewhere along the way, He must have let us all out to play,  
Turned his back and all God's children crept out the back door.

And it's hard to love, there's so much to hate,  
Hanging on to hope, when there is no hope to speak of.  
And the wounded skies above, say it's much too late.  
Well maybe we should all be praying for time...

These are the days of the empty hand, you hold on to what you can,  
And charity is a coat you wear twice a year.  
This is the year of the guilty man, your television takes a stand  
And you find that what was over there is over here.

So you scream from behind your door, say what's mine is mine and not yours  
I may have too much but I'll take my chances  
Because God's stopped keeping score.  
And you cling to the things they sold you, did you cover your eyes when they told you,  
That he can't come back, because he has no children to come back for.

It's hard to love, there's so much to hate,  
Hanging on to hope, when there is no hope to speak of.  
And the wounded skies above, say it's much too late.  
Well maybe we should all be praying for time.

Do you think we have time? Do you think we have time?  
Please give us time.

## APPENDIX 3

### DEFINITIONS

**Abundant Life:** Health and prosperity available for all people in all areas of life, including the body, mind, religious expression, emotions, relationships, material needs, as well as opportunities for education, employment, credit, environmental justice, legal support, and many other categories.

**Community:** Mutual relationships that are formed based around common needs.

**Engagement:** Actively participating with advocacy movements and networks working for social justice at a local and community level to transform unjust structures in society to bring equality and justice. <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/social-justice-and-advocacy-engagement>.

**Equality - Social equality** is a state of affairs in which all people within a specific society or isolated group have the same status in certain respects, including civil rights, freedom of speech, property rights and **equal** access to certain **social** goods and services.

**Injustice:** “Iniquity; wrong; any violation of another's rights, as fraud in contracts, or the withholding of what is due. It has a particular reference to an unequal distribution of rights, property or privileges among persons who have equal claims.” (KJV Dictionary)

**Opportunity:** Equality of opportunity exists when people have a chance to attain the same goals without the hindrance of the same obstacles.

**Oppression:** “The result of the use of institutional privilege and power, wherein one person or group benefits at the expense of another.” (Goldbach)

**Social justice:** The view that everyone deserves equal economic, political and social rights and opportunities.

**Systemic change:** Change that pervades all parts of a system, taking into account the interrelationships and interdependencies among those parts. ”

<https://systemicchange.wordpress.com/systemicchange/>

**Transformation:** Using the definition from Raymond Paloutzian on spiritual transformation, "spiritual transformation constitutes a change in the meaning system that a person holds as a basis for self-definition, the interpretation of life, and overarching purposes and ultimate concerns." (Paloutzian, 335)

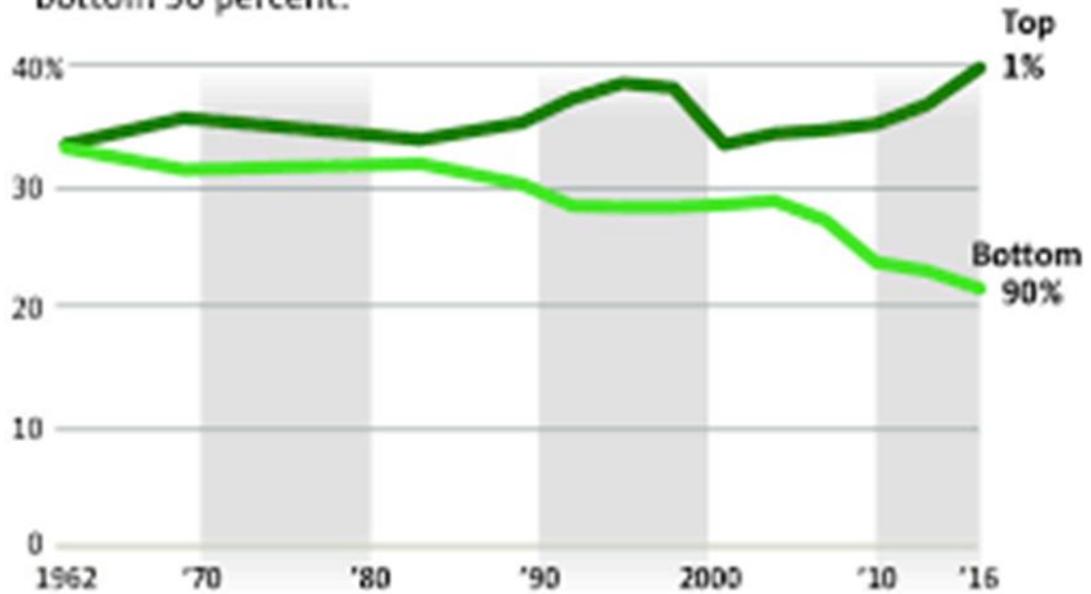
**White privilege:** Benefits for a group of people whom society identifies as white, beyond what is commonly experienced by non-white people under the same social, political, or economic circumstances. (McIntosh)

**White supremacy:** The belief that white people are superior to those of all other races, and should therefore dominate society in all ways and at all levels.

## APPENDIX 4

### Ultra-wealthy take more of the pie

Share of American wealth owned by top 1 percent versus bottom 90 percent.



Source: Edward N. Wolff

THE WASHINGTON POST

## APPENDIX 5

### Interview Questions

#### Background

Describe your family/those you grew up with.

Where did you live as a child? How would you describe the community? (Economic, religious, political, social, ethnic, descriptions)

Were you and your family active in a church? How did you participate? What ministries were you involved in?

#### Current

What is your understanding of the term “white” as it pertains to race?

When is the first time you remember understanding that you were white? Has your understanding of this term changed (or not) over time?

In general, do you see any differences for those who are white and those who are not? If so, would you please describe these differences?

Do you remember conversations or teachings about people “different” from you economically, ethnically, socially, religiously, etc. (positive or negative)? If so, would you please share these memories? Do you believe this had any impact on you? If so, how?

What is your understanding of justice and equality? Where/Who did these understandings come from?

In the Gospel of John 10:10, Jesus says that he offers *abundant life*. What does this phrase mean to you? What are the “components” that make up an abundant life? What does abundant life look like? (If you could picture abundant life, please describe it).

Has your understanding of this phrase changed in its meaning during your life?

Given this understanding, is there anyone who is not experiencing abundant life?

Is there a biblical “call” to help provide abundant life? If so, what is this call?

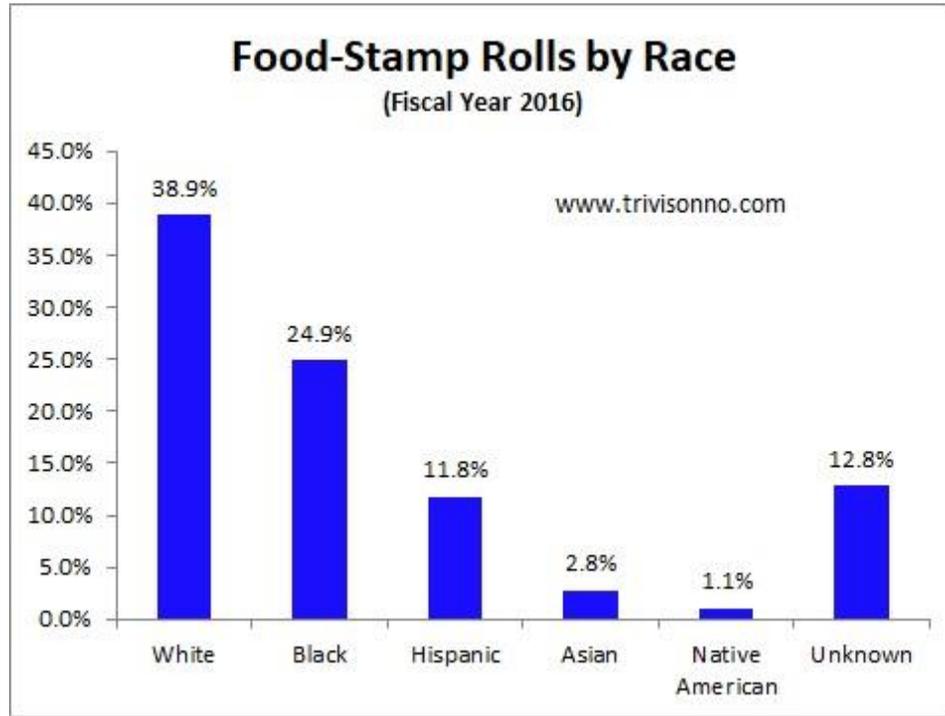
Are you actively participating in ministries that work to provide abundant life for those people who are not experiencing it?

If so, please describe your work. Why is it important to you to engage in this ministry? What specifically led you to this?

If not, why not? Is there any specific reason why you have not, or do not participate in these ministries?

Do you see yourself engaging in this work in the future? Why or why not?

## APPENDIX 6

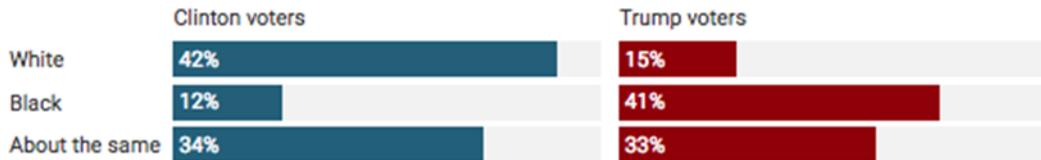


## APPENDIX 7

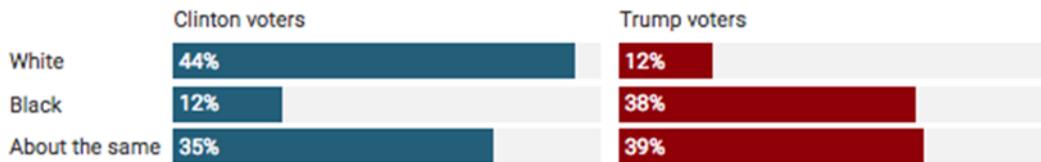
Trump supporters are also more likely than Clinton voters to overestimate the share of welfare and public housing benefits that go to black recipients.

Here is a list of federal government programs. For each one, please tell me whether you think that more of the recipients are white or black or if the numbers of black and white recipients are about the same.

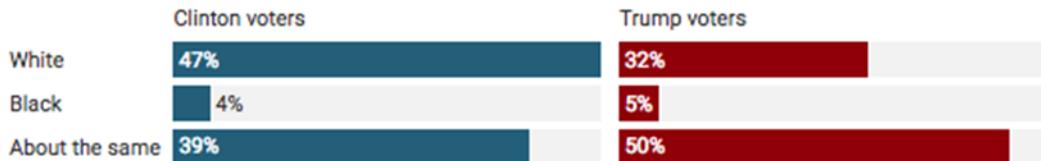
### Welfare



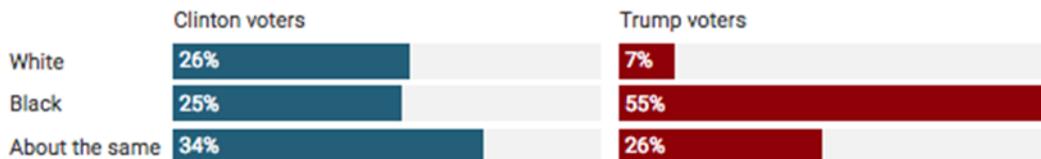
### Food stamps



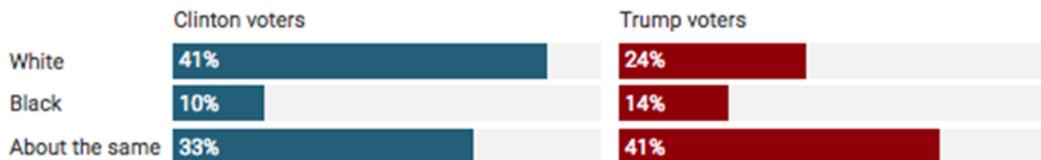
### Social Security



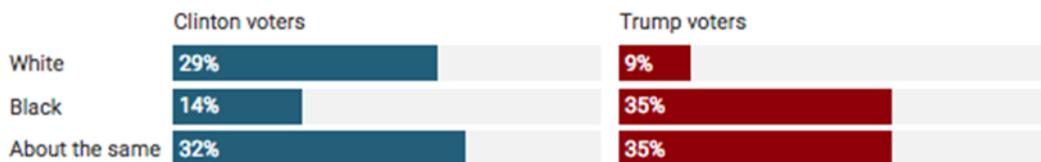
### Public housing



### Unemployment insurance



### Head Start



Source: HuffPost/YouGov poll. Jan. 17-18, 2018

## APPENDIX 8

### We All Bleed the Same – Mandisa, 2017

We all bleed the same. We're more beautiful when we come together.  
We all bleed the same. So tell me why, tell me why we're divided.

Woke up today, another headline,  
Another innocent life is taken, in the name of hatred.  
So hard to take, and if we think that it's all good,  
Then we're mistaken, 'cause my heart is breaking.  
Are you left? Are you right? Pointing fingers, taking sides.  
When are we gonna realize?

We all bleed the same. We're more beautiful when we come together  
We all bleed the same. So tell me why, tell me why we're divided.  
If we're gonna fight, let's fight for each other.  
If we're gonna shout, let love be the cry.  
We all bleed the same. So tell me why, tell me why we're divided.

Tell me, who are we, to judge someone  
By the kind of clothes they're wearing, or the color of their skin?  
Are you black? Are you white? Aren't we all the same inside?  
Father open our eyes to see!

We all bleed the same. We're more beautiful when we come together  
We all bleed the same. So tell me why, tell me why we're divided.  
If we're gonna fight, let's fight for each other.  
If we're gonna shout, let love be the cry.  
We all bleed the same. So tell me why, tell me why we're divided.

Only love can drive out all the darkness. What are we fighting for?  
We were made to carry one another. We were made for more.  
Only love can drive out all the darkness. What are we fighting for?  
We were made to carry one another, We were made for more!

We all bleed the same. We're more beautiful when we come together  
We all bleed the same. So tell me why, tell me why we're divided.  
If we're gonna fight, let's fight for each other.  
If we're gonna shout, let love be the cry.  
We all bleed the same. Let's stand united. Let's stand united!

## APPENDIX 9

### Toxic Charity (Redacted)

**Q: You say churches and charities can harm those they propose to help. How?**

A: Typically, the giving is one-way: those of us with the resources give to those with a lack of resources. One-way giving tends to make the poor objects of pity, which harms their dignity. It also erodes their work ethic and produces a dependency that is unhealthy both for the giver and the recipient.

**Q: What is one of the worst instances of `toxic charity' you have witnessed?**

A: The food pantry idea has led to some fairly ugly relationships. The church or group sets up rules to govern how the food is distributed; the recipients figure out ways to circumvent those rules; and they become upset when they don't get the food they wanted — there's a kind of a built-in antagonism that grows between the dispensers and the recipients.

**Q: Why do you think ill-formed charity is so pervasive?**

A: The feel-good experience draws us back in. In our newsletters about mission trips we report how wonderful and grateful the people are, but what we don't hear are the ways that the trips damage people behind the scenes. I don't think we've held up good models of development. When there's a flood or a hurricane, folks continue operating on a one-way, crisis, give-to-the-poor mentality long after development should have taken place, because it's easier for relief agencies to sell crisis than development and empowerment.

**Q: You advise limiting one-way giving to "emergency situations." What do you define as an emergency situation?**

A: A home burning down, a bad hurricane, a devastating earthquake, a famine. What we interpret as crisis, particularly in the U.S., is a different matter. Many of those who are running our food pantries and our clothes closets, for example, feel they are meeting a crisis need of unemployed families. I contend that those are chronic poverty issues that deserve a development strategy.

**Q: What is one of the best examples you have seen of a charity that works well?**

A: We converted our food pantry into a food co-op. Members of the co-op put in \$3 a week; with that, we can purchase \$30 worth of groceries from the food bank. The members of the co-op actually own it, run it, collect the money, do the shopping and decide what the rules are. It becomes an empowering process.

**Q: Are there any wide-scale studies or statistical data to support your claims?**

A: On a national scale, look at the results of the one-way giving that has gone into countries in Africa or Haiti over the years. Those statistics are available, and they're

blatant. But I don't know of any studies that have been done to quantify the harm versus the benefits of U.S. food distribution. It's an unexamined industry.

**Q: It seems like you could be facing some heat for this; what has been the reaction so far?**

A: I've gotten mixed reviews. It confirms the suspicions of a growing number of people, but for those who are involved in the distribution, it feels like a slap in the face. I think the whole thing is going to be fairly controversial.

**Q: What's the most controversial idea in the book?**

A: It might be that most of our service projects and mission trips are counterproductive. We spend as much as \$5 billion dollars annually on mission trips, millions of Americans take them every year, and the amount of good accomplished is very, very minimal compared to the expenditures we're laying out.

**Q: Is your book a justification for libertarian politics?**

A: I don't think it is a political book at all. It is a practical book — it has to do with the practice of charity. It calls for responsible charity, examined charity, rather than mindless charity.

## **APPENDIX 10**

### **NYAC Clergy and Lay Statement Special Session of Annual Conference March 16, 2019**

The vote at the United Methodist General Conference in St. Louis caused great harm and spiritual violence to the LGBTQIA+ community. The New York Annual Conference grieves this hurt. We pledge to continue to affirm the lives, ministries, and families of our LGBTQIA+ siblings. We pledge to continue to love and serve all people.

We are the New York Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.

We believe...

Love is love

All persons are of sacred worth

Black Lives Matter

Climate Change is real

No human being is illegal

All genders are whole, holy, and in the image of God

Women's rights are human rights

Colonialism is white supremacy in action

To devalue one person is to devalue all people

We affirm the truth as written by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. that "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

We are the New York Annual Conference.

We are working towards God's justice.

We will only get there if we work towards it together.

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