

SCARCITY, POVERTY AND THEOLOGY:
TENSIONS FOR THE COURAGEOUS LEADER

A dissertation submitted to the
Theological School
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Ministry

Advisor: Jennifer Quigley, Th.D.

Professional Mentor: Mark Wallace, Ph.D.

Zuline Gray Wilkinson

Drew University

Madison, New Jersey

May 13, 2022

ABSTRACT

SCARCITY, POVERTY AND THEOLOGY: TENSIONS FOR THE COURAGEOUS LEADER

Zuline Gray Wilkinson

Chester Eastside, Inc., Chester, PA 19013

I enrolled in the Drew University Doctor of Ministry Program when I held the position of Executive Director of Chester Eastside, Inc. (CEI). CEI is a faith-based organization in Chester, PA, that supplies food, clothing, and other basic personal care necessities. In addition, the agency sponsors afterschool and summer programs. Its target population is the poor in Chester, PA.

This dissertation is an outgrowth of my interest in exploring the nature of scarcity and poverty and incorporating them into an exegesis of three biblical passages: Acts 6:1-7; Luke 9:10-17, and Matthew 25:31-46. This work discusses the ways in which scarcity and poverty can influence the leader's mindset, thereby producing tension in interpersonal and professional relationships.

This dissertation explores poverty from three perspectives: an Ancient Near East view, biblical exegesis, and the concept of the Holy Poor. To conduct the task, I used an Autoethnographic-historical-exegetical analysis as the methodology. Autoethnography is the framework for integrating the biblical texts and exploring the intersections that produce tension for the leader and for the organization. I read these texts within their historical context integrating my reflections as a leader.

Chapter One is an autoethnographic reflection of the leader and is foundational for later chapters. In this chapter, the self-revelations place the leader in a context where

there is firsthand experience and knowledge of poverty. Chapter Two sets forth a historical context of CEI which connects its own scarcity with that of its community. The chapter also raises the issue of adaptive leadership which includes a diagnosis of the organization; technical skills to identify challenges; barriers to effective leadership, and shared buy-in for change. Chapter Three dives into the concept of scarcity mindset and its effect. It explores poverty in antiquity which continues into the present. Chapter Four explores three New Testament passages and analyzes them from the viewpoints of scarcity and adaptive leadership. Chapter Five provides a summary of the work along with a definition of options for the poor using a liberation theology perspective.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my parents, the late Deacon Arthur T. Gray, Sr., and Gladys M. Hagans Gray, without whom I am not. They loved me, my sister, Ann, my brother, Arthur, and adopted sister, Cathy. They always told us we were loved. Mother, at 96 years of age, continues to do so daily. Daddy, Arthur, Jr., and Cathy have transitioned into eternity and the glorious presence of our Savior. Ann and I, along with our wonderful husbands and families, care for our dear mother.

This dedication is also meant for my esteemed husband, Jean, whom I love with all my heart. Jean loves me unequivocally and wants the best for me. He encouraged me to actively engage in this learning process knowing that it would culminate in the achievement of a life goal. My “Dr. J,” as I lovingly refer to him, has walked alongside supporting me; in the back, pushing me. He never stopped insisting that I keep moving forward. I have no words to express my gratitude.

With her usual pragmatism, my sister and confidante, Ann, cheered me to the finish. My sister-in-love, Lenore, joined the chorus of well-wishers.

Children and grandchildren are gifts from God. I pray that mine will always remember how much I love them. I will leave them a legacy of seeking the kingdom of God, which is the foundation for lifelong learning and productive living.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	vi
Chapter One: Memories and Exegesis.....	1
Chapter Two: The Case for Adaptive Leadership.....	12
Chapter Three: Scarcity and Poverty.....	27
Chapter Four: Erasure or Intersectionality?.....	44
Chapter Five: Options for the Poor.....	59
Bibliography.....	78
Appendix A: Communication Challenges.....	81
Appendix B: Stakeholders Sustainability.....	83
Appendix C: Activity Timeline.....	84
Appendix D: SWOT Analysis.....	85

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Myriad people have contributed to my life. I am grateful for my professional roles and experiences that have propelled me to this place. Public school teachers who instilled a love for learning include Ms. Millbury, Mr. Harris, Ms. Gray, Ms. Kennedy, and Ms. Baer. University professors at Temple University, Dr. Kennedy and the University of Pennsylvania, Dr. Shoemaker, Dr. Bloom, Professor Sylvester, Professor Meeks, and Dean Arnold, Dr. Tisch and Dean Geller stimulated me to think theoretically, socially, and politically. Professors at Princeton Theological Seminary reminded me that God is not limited by time or chronology. I met Dr. LaRue at a *Live* Retreat at Princeton. His words convinced me that I had gifts to offer the Church and the world. From him, I learned the art of preaching and nuances of preaching in a global context. Dr. Brown helped me explore my preaching voice in whatever context I serve. Dr. McKee was inspiring! Her vast knowledge made Reformation History one of the most essential learning experiences of my life. Thanks to Rev. Smith-Ammon for her attentiveness to second and third career students at the seminary; her prayer support undergirded me during my time there.

My Church is the spiritual family and the place where I have experienced affirmation. I learned about Jesus' love at the feet of my first pastor, Rev. Watkins. Sis. Duckett, Sis. Connell, Sis. Hager, Sis. Watkins encouraged my development.

West Oak Lane Church of God offered opportunities to lead. I am grateful for the life of my late pastor emeritus, The Reverend Doctor Horace W. Sheppard, Sr. His dynamic preaching was theologically substantive, insightful, and prophetic. Pastor Emeritus entrusted leadership roles to me when I was a young adult. His confidence

made a tremendous impact on my life and ministry. Sis. Richardson, Sis. Carney and Mother P. Sheppard mentored and affirmed me in special ways.

Now at Bethesda Christian Fellowship Church of God, I sit under and serve alongside Senior Pastor, The Reverend Doctor Horace W. Sheppard, Jr., and First Lady Linda. I am blessed to serve this community, where growing in Christ is our utmost desire. Few are gifted to preach the reality of Jesus Christ like Pastor Horace! You have an intimate glimpse of our Lord Jesus through his inspiring sermons. Elders Sylvia and Frank are my group leaders and prayer warriors who intercede for me often.

Special friends and colleagues bless my life. Sybil, my long sister-friend and I shared life's ups and downs. LaTanya, Luwanna, and Sharlene are my support team; we enjoyed life together. They will forever hold special places in my heart. I could not imagine life without my sisters from other mothers Bonnie, Nadine, Elsa, Daphne, Christine, Nancy L., Yvonne, Shirley, Evelyn, Joanie, Lois, and Dot. I love each of you more than I can express.

It is an honor to be an ordained member of the Church of God in the East led by Reverend Griffith and Reverend Dr. Stevens.

Thanks to Dr. Meredith Hoxie-Schol and my professors at Drew University for advancing my knowledge of courageous leadership. To my esteemed dissertation team Dr. Jennifer Quigley and Dr. Mark Wallace, thank you for sharing your deep understanding of the relationships between theology, social class and economics.

Lastly, this task required an administrative team to get to the finish. Dr. Elizabeth, Kelsey and Vera: you are amazing! You are precious examples of love in action.

CHAPTER ONE

MEMORIES AND EXEGESIS

I grew up in the Mantua area of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. They called it, “The Bottom.” Kids in school always wanted to know where in “The Bottom” you lived. I never spoke of our neighborhood in those words. The bottom was a negative connotation; the bottom represented the dregs, where no one would want to be. I wondered where the moniker originated. The place where I lived was not a negative. It was where I lived life, playing alongside neighbor kids under my parents' watchful eyes, attending Belmont School, and participating in Church. I have beautiful memories of my family – Mother, Daddy, sister, and younger brother. Some days after our parents came home from work (using public transportation or walking if there was no carfare), our family walked to the Philadelphia Zoo with my Daddy pulling our brother in a little red wagon. Walking to the zoo was always exciting for my sister, brother, me and my parents. We looked from the outside and could see the lions, bears, and giraffes behind the high wrought-iron fences. We never went inside the Philadelphia Zoo, even though it was a primary destination in Philadelphia. Visiting the zoo and then Fairmount Park was a simple exposure our parents could give us. There were no admission fees. They could afford what they paid – the time to walk us there to look in from outside. Often, Mother prepared a dinner of fried chicken, potato salad, garden salad, and lemonade, and we ate in the park. Those summer evenings remain in our collective memories; we may not have had access to what others viewed as ordinary, but we had a loving family.

The Church was integral to our lives. Both our parents had accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior; they committed to raising us in a Christian household. Being Christian meant something to them. They didn't smoke, drink, or curse; that set them apart from others on the block. I noticed that everyone referred to them as Mr. and Mrs. Gray; they had presence. Sunday School, church, and youth meetings filled our Sunday mornings, afternoons, and evenings. I loved the hymns and the preaching. The first time I knelt at a public altar, I was not more than eight years of age. The preacher thundered, "A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way." Something about the highway metaphor captivated me then and continues to do so now. The preacher talked about the elements of holiness and a holy lifestyle. At eight years old, I had already sensed that holiness was different. It meant living a purposeful life intent on pleasing God. From that simple act of crying out to God as a youngster, I still desire a personal connection to God as the years of career, academic pursuits, and ministry wane. My view of God based on my hermeneutical interpretation of the Bible developed over my lifetime. As a child, I believed that Jesus loved me. As I grew in faith, I realized that Jesus paid the price for my sin. His atonement was for humanity in general and me, in particular. My responsibility as a believer is to live in the awareness that sharing God's grace with others is a byproduct of God's grace toward me.

In my family, we exercised grace by lovingly sharing our resources with others. That could mean a meal on Sunday afternoons and walking seniors to and from church, even if it meant going a couple of blocks out of our way. Once we had a car, Daddy offered rides and ran errands for those without transportation. Living in the awareness of God meant sharing the space in our home and offering physical respite to mitigate

homelessness or trauma. Based upon New Testament stories of the early Church sharing their lives in the community, my parents acted by the principle that Christians shared with others without reservation, trusting that God would care for our needs. Matthew attributes words to Jesus about God's care for the flowers, the birds, and people. Thus, the environment, living things, and humanity are important to God and ought to also govern the people of God. The psalmist declared that God's Word provides enlightenment and direction for life.

By the time I was 17 years of age, I had experienced a compelling inclination to service. I did so with enthusiasm and trepidation, for I sensed a call away from self to a life of selflessness. When I attended college at Temple University, I became keenly aware that some children were alone and without the security of caring parents. I was confident that I needed to help young people in their homes and support their school and life success. Social Work became my calling. Two years after my college graduation, God, through the Lutheran Church in America, funded my Master of Social Work studies at the University of Pennsylvania. There, I learned about people, social policy, community organizing, and administration. As I do now, I believed then that my gift was to actualize the Gospel in the world beyond the church sanctuary. I prepared to become a leader and influencer for social justice. Four decades later, I accept that God is and has been at work in all my pursuits, whether in professional roles within health networks, community organizations, or the Church.

There were many challenges when I finally attended seminary more than thirty years after graduate school. I wondered whether my orthodox faith would come under intense scrutiny. I was from an Anabaptist-Wesleyan background matriculating at a

prestigious mainline seminary. Would my views about God's active and personal participation in the life of God's people stand? Would I be welcome to express my belief in the all-powerful God of the Old Testament, God in the flesh, Emmanuel in the New Testament, and the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit? Could I interpret words attributed to Jesus, "You give them something to eat," as a mandate to the believer? If I were puzzled or questioning, could I speak up? It did not take long for me to find out.

After one of my first seminary classes, I approached my professor quietly and away from my peers, perhaps like Nicodemus seeking out Jesus in John 3:1-3. Given what I noticed in the Book of Acts, I asked the professor how the early Church had moved from community to become the competitive, highly resourced institution seen in the Medieval Church, which seemed to prey upon believers. I raised my question because I saw a disconnection between what I read in Acts and the behaviors I was learning about in Church History. The answer I received was, and still is, shocking and puzzling: "How do you know what the Bible says if you do not know Hebrew and Greek?" The professor seemed to view my interpretation of the particular pericope as baseless. The elitism of their answer caused me to question the professor's hermeneutics. I questioned whether the study of antiquity and its languages were the only determinants for informing Christian beliefs and actions. There had to be more to exegesis than language.

My dissertation explores critical texts with a view of hermeneutics that allows for the intersection of the contemporary reader's history and experiences as integral to interpretation. Embracing the biblical context and enabling readers to insert themselves into the text is essential to exegesis. Exegesis is central to my project. I will address the relationship between scarcity mindset, poverty, and theology and how they produce

tension in the leader. What did Jesus mean as 5,000 people faced an immediate hunger crisis when he uttered, “You give them something to eat.” His exhortation demanded an urgent response, and like other passages in Matt. 25:31-46 and Acts 6:1-7, it emphasized Jesus' practical application of the Hebrew scriptures. I argue that mindset has ramifications which produce an impact on the community as well as tension for the leader.

METHODOLOGY

The question I pose is: Does biblical interpretation influence the Church's view of poverty? This project will explore the concept of the poor and the Holy Poor. I provide a historical framework for poverty starting from an Ancient Near Eastern perspective. The historical context is in conversation with an exegesis of Acts 6:1-7, Luke 9:10-17, and Matt. 25:34-45. Their contexts and social locations provide theological evidence for organizing and developing specific approaches to assisting the poor.

My research approach is autoethnographic-historical-exegetical analysis. I draw on adaptive leadership theory to identify my leadership inclinations. I also adopt the focus in my exegesis of scripture passages.

Autoethnography “is an autobiographical genre of academic writing that draws on and analyzes or interprets the lived experience of the author. It connects researcher insights regarding self-identity, cultural rules and resources, communication practices, symbols, rules, shared meanings, emotions, values, and larger social, cultural, and political issues.”¹

¹ Christopher Poulos, *Essentials of Autoethnography* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2021), 13.

Autoethnography allows researchers to insert themselves into the topic as an interested participant.² The researcher uses their own experiences by inserting stories and examples into the work. Autoethnographic research is qualitative and phenomenological. It introduces memories, emotions, and observations into its subject.³ The approach brings “an amalgam of images, meanings and emotions” into the researcher’s writing designed to speak to the reader’s heart.⁴ It invites the reader into their world, where the researcher raises important questions that are moving, painful, insightful and focused on the human condition.⁵ Autoethnography validates “deep and careful self-reflection – typically referred to as ‘reflexivity’ – to name and interrogate the intersections between self and society, the particular and the general, the personal and the political.”⁶ Such research incorporates teaching, decision making, and direction to make meaning out of their circumstances. The approach appreciates intellectual rigor along with emotion and creativity; the goal being to “strive for social justice and to make life better.”⁷ The genre uses memories, reflections, notetaking and writing to study research questions. The process may describe and critique cultural beliefs, practices and experiences.⁸ This approach lends itself to studying the intersectionality between “self and society, the

² Poulos, *Essentials of Autoethnography*, 9.

³ Poulos, *Essentials of Autoethnography*, 13.

⁴ Poulos, *Essentials of Autoethnography*, 52.

⁵ Poulos, *Essentials of Autoethnography*, 58.

⁶ Poulos, *Essentials of Autoethnography*, 13.

⁷ Poulos, *Essentials of Autoethnography*, 13.

⁸ Poulos, *Essentials of Autoethnography*, 13.

particular and the general, the personal and the political.”⁹ This dissertation addresses theological exegesis as it relates to history, ethnography and adaptive leadership.

During my graduate study at Drew University, I kept notes and submitted papers that comprise the body of this research endeavor. I am intrigued because autoethnography permits me, as the researcher and writer, to ask questions about subjects that are important to me – poverty, theology, and [my leadership] practice.

My second focus is historical research. I read literature on the history and sociology of Ancient Near Eastern culture. I was particularly interested in the intersections between social status and economic levels. I delved into history and learned that from earliest civilization there were rigid social structures that depended on slave labor for economic stability. Yet, “biblical teachings were incompatible with social and political circumstances” in ancient times and continuing into the 21st century.¹⁰ David Aberbach asserts that “the Bible insists on unqualified sympathy for the poor.”¹¹ He concludes that “charity is an absolute good, the yardstick of a Godly society.”¹²

Adaptive Leadership is a communal transformation for ministry, according to Tod Bolsinger, in *Canoeing the Mountains*.¹³ The basic tenets of the model are “to transform both individual and corporate growth, so that they— together – participate in Christ’s

⁹ Poulos, *Essentials of Autoethnography*, 13.

¹⁰ David Aberbach, *Literature and Poverty: From the Hebrew Bible to the Second World War* (London: Routledge, 2019), 26.

¹¹ Aberbach, *Literature and Poverty*, 26.

¹² Aberbach, *Literature and Poverty*, 26.

¹³ Tod Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 39.

mission to establish the kingdom of God ‘on earth as it is in heaven’.”¹⁴ Rather than focus solely on problem solving, adaptive leadership relies on a community facing challenges together. They take on challenges by adapting to circumstances and finding new possibilities in them.¹⁵

Chapter Two concentrates on the history of Chester Eastside, Inc. (CEI), and its relationship to various faith communities. Program development, fund development, as well as theological, historical and sustainability issues affect the organization. The dissertation highlights the agency’s challenges and how they contribute to a scarcity mindset. In subsequent chapters of the dissertation, I will reflect upon my role as the former Executive Director of CEI. I will address scarcity from the perspectives of the organization, church, and community and discuss the tension it produced for me despite my intentional commitment to intersectionality and adaptive leadership. Using a well-known metaphor about an environmental catastrophe, a leader might be compared to a containment vessel that holds tension. When the stress is handled improperly and is poorly contained under pressure, it could erupt as in the Chernobyl disaster.

Chernobyl was a nuclear reactor explosion which occurred on April 26, 1986, in the then Soviet Socialist Republic of Ukraine. An ill-contrived experiment by workers to shut down the reactor caused a massive nuclear explosion. There is only a little distance between the period when I was in the reactor at CEI and now not being there at all. CEI took a far different toll on me than any other professional experience. This was to be the organization where I would finally prove: 1) that engaging the dispossessed carried a

¹⁴ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 39.

¹⁵ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 41.

theological mandate; 2) Jesus' call to care for others could become actual; and 3) CEI would be a place where trust and integrity would be the norm, and race and other 'isms' would be of no consequence. I was wrong.

The stinging narrative of Frank B. Wilderson, III, captures feelings and questions of self-doubt that underlie my work. Creativity and vision are innate characteristics of my leadership. Taking on tasks to re-engineer, re-organize and resurrect dying organizations has been my strength in every professional assignment; “now it was clear that I missed the boat. My parasites were Humans, all Humans—the haves as well as the have nots.”¹⁶ Wilderson points out that the parasites grow out of “parasitic capital and colonialism”¹⁷ which fed on him for coherence. Being rid of parasitism is challenging, and Wilderson raises an even more provocative discussion. He insists that “if we are to engage rather than disavow, the difference between Humans [white people] who suffer through an ‘economy of disposability’ and *Blacks* who suffer by way of ‘social death’ then we must come to grips with ... the redemption of the subaltern.”¹⁸ In Wilderson’s world, “Human” refers to the white people and nonwhites who are not Black. He surmises that full comprehension of human loss requires an understanding between loss and absence and the realization that “subaltern loss stands on the rubble of Black absence.”¹⁹ I did not know the term, subaltern, when I accepted the call to CEI. Five years later, I have lived through it and survived with some scars – theological and personal. I was in a situation

¹⁶ Frank B. Wilderson, III, *Afropessimism* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2020), 16.

¹⁷ Wilderson, *Afropessimism*, 18.

¹⁸ Wilderson, *Afropessimism*, 16.

¹⁹ Wilderson, *Afropessimism*, 19.

where my thoughts, ideas, and decisions did not align with whatever the organization [Humans] thought they wanted. Though I have not adopted Afropessimism as my personal ideology, the tensions I encountered as a leader at CEI validate a basic claim of what Wilderson calls a metatheory. Afropessimism, according to Wilderson, argues that “... blacks are not Human subjects, but are instead structurally inert props, implements for the execution of White and Non-white fantasies and sadomasochistic pleasures...”

²⁰This connotes that Blacks are not included in the theory of universal humanity. Rather, “our flesh and energies are instrumentalized” for others’ agendas.²¹ In short, Blacks do not have agency. How could that be the case for this knowledgeable, experienced, well-educated, and competent leader? It did not matter that I had expended tremendous emotional and psychological energy endeavoring to achieve outcomes for unstated goals. My imaginings were erased, which proved to be a shocking and painful realization. As I dissect the concepts of scarcity, poverty and theology, the goal is to offer strategies for reducing tension for the courageous leader.

Chapter Three details the concepts of scarcity and the theology of poverty. In addition, it identifies the Holy Poor and discusses intersectionality in the culture and theology of the ancients. The in-depth exploration of the Holy Poor distinguishes between those who voluntarily become poor and the vulnerable poor. This research explores the meaning of the Holy Poor from two lenses: one, the Hebrew scriptures, and the second, Ancient Near Eastern history. The goal of this work is to describe biblical attitudes and the treatment of the vulnerable poor. Writers who have

²⁰ Wilderson, *Afropessimism*, 15.

²¹ Wilderson, *Afropessimism*, 15.

previously explored these ideas include Aberbach, Evan Moffic, Henry Virkler and Karelynn Ayayo. Economics is a recurring theme throughout biblical texts, which is addressed by Richard Horsley and Peter Brown.

Intersectionality is critically important in this dissertation. The history, social identity, and culture of an organization, its staff and leadership is crucial to understanding how the elements influence organizational mission. In my experience as a nonprofit leader the intersections between race and poverty are most often ignored; however, they are essential elements for evaluating an organization's ability to adapt to the changing nonprofit landscape. Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge include the concept of power dynamics in their discussion of intersectionality. Naming it the "interpersonal domain of power," they point out that individuals experience "the convergence of structural, cultural and disciplinary power. Such power shapes the intersecting identities of race, class, gender, sexuality, nation and age."²² The authors describe the vulnerabilities that affect how individuals experience bias and racism. "Intersectionality," they say, "highlights these aspects of individual experience that we may not notice."²³

In Chapter Four, the question I pose is: Does biblical interpretation influence the Church's view of poverty? The chapter speaks to complex issues in biblical interpretation and the tendency to erase elements of Scripture. My exegesis is based on Acts 6:1-7, Luke 9:1-7, and Matt. 25: 36-40. Chapter Five summarizes my arguments regarding intersectionality, exegesis, and adaptive leadership.

²² Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality* (Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2020), 15.

²³ Collins and Bilge, *Intersectionality*, 15.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CASE FOR ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP ¹

Adaptive leadership forces the consideration of significant questions. Nonprofit organizations face challenges that require strategic direction amid rapid social, political, and theological transformations. Chester Eastside, Inc. (CEI), a small faith-based nonprofit in Chester, PA, felt the impact of competing forces that resulted in organizational challenges. The New Testament passage of Matt. 25:25-40 is the theological tenet upon which this urban ministry was built. The agency has never deviated from its core mission and values.

Chester Eastside, Inc. a 35-year-old organization, founded as Chester Eastside Ministries (CEM), began as a mission of the Presbytery of Philadelphia. It was housed in the former Third Presbyterian Church on the Eastside of Chester, Pennsylvania. The church was designed by noted architect Isaac Pursell in the Gothic Revival style. It was built at 9th and Potter streets in Chester, Pennsylvania, and opened in 1896. The magnificent edifice could seat hundreds, for it featured unique design elements, including double-hinged doors and walls that could be rolled up or down to extend the size of the sanctuary and other classrooms. The building was also distinguished by its beautiful red tile angled roof. The impressive Greystone structure on the city's main residential thoroughfare highlighted the socioeconomic divide in Chester.

¹ This chapter is a redaction of a paper submitted for Drew University DMIN 952 Leading Transformational Ministry, taught by Peter Weaver, Th.D., Spring 2020.

Chester is the southernmost point in Southeastern Pennsylvania. Located along the Delaware River, it is eleven miles from Wilmington, Delaware, and fifteen miles from the center city of Philadelphia. The Industrial Highway is a major east-west thoroughfare which runs through the eastern edge of the city. Once home to the affluent and middle classes, Chester was the seat of shopping and entertainment. Christopher Mele describes Chester as “the small City left behind long ago—the city people travel through at high speeds, the city people ignore, or as they have for decades, consciously avoid.”²

Chester was surrounded by large scale manufacturing; it attracted many people seeking employment. By 1914 Chester was a prosperous town, boasting the largest shipbuilding yards in the United States, textile mills, and steel and iron production plants. Later, a Ford assembly plant open. The population grew exponentially doubling from 40,000 in 1914 to 80,000 by 1918. White migration from Eastern Europe and Black migration from the southern states contributed to tremendous congestion in the small town. Housing availability, schools, workplaces, and the public infrastructure weakened as the population increased.³ Migrants from the South, largely Black Americans, came for the economic advantages. At the same time, immigrants from eastern Europe were also newcomers to the community. Jobs were plentiful but housing was less so. Crowding people into homes converted from single-family dwellings to rooming houses increased congestion in the small community. The city’s political machine was heavily involved in

² Christopher Mele, *Race and the Politics of Deception* (New York: New York University Press, 2107), 2.

³ Mele, *Race and the Politics of Deception*, 24-26.

the underworld; however, the White community attributed social ills to a growing Black population. Mele graphically describes the racism embedded in the community separated by race, education, and social standing on the backdrop of a ruthless political machine.⁴

By the 1950s, growing suburbanization attracted Whites to communities outside of Chester City. The “underlying ethos of mass suburbanization was the idea that integration would damage white interests. For whites, relocating to the suburbs meant leaving behind city living and with it the prospect of living with black neighbors.”⁵ As plants closed, the economy of the city took a turn downward.

White flight contributed to the dwindling population which also affected the churches. Third Presbyterian Church, which was once an influential church in the Presbyterian denomination, left its building, and the members merged with another congregation in Chester. The Presbytery re-purposed the vacant building, and it became the site of CEM in 1985.⁶ CEM remained in that space for over twenty-five years. It sponsored various programs to serve the Chester community through food and clothing distribution, educational and cultural arts programs for children, peacemaking activities, and advocacy. Third Presbyterian Church (figure 1), an architectural masterpiece, was expensive to maintain. Over time the building went into greater disrepair. Still, the Presbytery funded the Ministry’s programs and managed the building from 1985 until 2013. However, during the early 2000s, the Presbytery, concerned about the budgetary impact of CEM and several other of its social ministries, decided to restructure its

⁴ Mele, *Race and the Politics of Deception*, 17-30.

⁵ Mele, *Race and the Politics of Deception*, 63.

⁶ Chester Historical Preservation Committee, <https://chesterpreservation.org/about/old-third-presbyterian-church/>.

mission outreach support. The Presbytery planned to create a community development corporation. The idea never gained traction, and the Presbytery abandoned it.



Figure 1⁷

Third Presbyterian was declared uninhabitable in 2014. The Presbytery issued an immediate order to vacate the building. Some portions of the building may have been useable, “but the sanctuary was in need of expensive repairs. Without any clear idea what to do with the site, it was slated for demolition until in 2015 the Chester Historic Preservation Committee (CHPC) purchased the building for a dollar.”⁸ In May 2020 the church was destroyed by a fire believed to be arson (figure 2).



Figure 2⁹

⁷ Matthew Christopher, “Third Presbyterian Church,” *Abandoned America*, <https://www.abandonedamerica.us/third-presbyterian-church>.

⁸ Christopher, “Third Presbyterian Church.”

⁹ Christopher, “Third Presbyterian Church.”

The context of a society affects its cultural and societal institutions. Such was the case in Chester. Mele suggests that rapid changes and political corruption contributes to the decline and stereotyping of the community.¹⁰ In my view, the community conditions represent loss and contribute to what I term community/societal depression. Everyone experienced loss when Chester began to decline—the White community, the Black community, city institutions, and the school system. The crime rate increased and ripped the fabric of a once rich community.

The Board of Directors of then CEM, contrary to what seemed would be the demise of the agency, adopted a leadership stance. They actively engaged in a strategic planning process and moved forward with a plan to become a nonprofit organization under the Internal Revenue Service Code. In 2014, the agency incorporated as Chester Eastside, Inc. (CEI). While the Board was involved in strategic planning process, an Episcopal Deacon and member of the CEI Board of Directors approached the rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, one block away from the Ministry's former location. After a short negotiation, St. Paul's invited CEI to make its home in their building (figure 3).



Figure 3¹¹

¹⁰ Mele, *Race and the Politics of Deception*, 29.

¹¹ St. Paul's Episcopal Church website, <https://stpaulschesterpa.com/>.

St. Paul's has a long and illustrious history in the City of Chester. Established in 1702, the church has moved several times. Although many changes occurred in Chester, St. Paul's remained in the community rather than moving to the suburbs. According to its website, "Church membership peaked in the mid-1960s, but subsequently, Chester experienced an economic downturn. Several times in the past few decades, [they] considered relocating the church from Chester to the outlying suburbs, but [they] concluded that the church should remain as a point of stability in the city."¹² The congregation at St. Paul's had dwindled to less than one hundred attendees. The church building is known as the place which houses CEI; however, outside of that, the church has not been viewed as an active participant in community affairs. The congregation demonstrates its investment in CEI's mission by charging the agency a modest rent for use of the facilities. St. Paul's also donates funds to the work of the agency and encourages volunteer involvement. A liaison from their vestry is a member of CEI's Board of Directors.

The move across the street did not sever CEI's relationship with the Presbytery, which continued to provide financial support to the agency. The amount decreased from \$160,000 in the early 2000s to approximately \$37,000 in 2019. Though still technically a mission of the Presbytery of Philadelphia, the relationship between CEI and the Presbytery changed quickly. The Executive Director, Rev. Bernice Warren, who had led the agency for over 25 years, retired in October 2016. The agency Board of Directors recruited me as the new Executive Director, and I soon learned about the challenges that awaited.

SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION AND PURPOSE OF CHESTER EASTSIDE

... for I was hungry, and you gave me food, I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked, and you gave me clothing ... just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” (Matt. 25:35-40)¹³

This Matthew passage guides the mission of CEI. The organization’s mission statement conveys the sentiment of scripture: “Through education, advocacy and social services, CEI creates a welcoming and inclusive environment that encourages and enables Chester residents to achieve their goals and aspirations and promotes peace and social justice.”¹⁴ The organization’s core values are Integrity and Social Justice, which are grounded “in love and respect for all people.”¹⁵ CEI intentionally lives out its Christian perspective and does not discriminate based on race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability. Even though the agency faces many obstacles, it has not deviated from these principles. According Todd Bolsinger, a leader “must have clear convictions about his or her call or purpose. ...The leader in the system is committed to the mission when no one else is.”¹⁶

At CEI, it is apparent that people – Board, staff, and volunteers – are involved with the work due to a sense of purpose and deep convictions. Purpose and conviction stabilized the agency even when it faced possible extinction.¹⁷ Because CEI’s core

¹³ Unless otherwise notes, scripture quotations are taken from the NRSV.

¹⁴ Chester Eastside, Inc., “Mission Statement,” <http://www.chestereastside.org/>.

¹⁵ Chester Eastside, Inc, “Core Values,” <https://www.chestereastside.org/>.

¹⁶ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 131.

¹⁷ Based on my conversations with Board and staff members, in the early 2000s, the Presbytery of Philadelphia set about to create a Community Development Corporation to bring all its mission agencies together. The initiative was not successful. Some organizations, including CEI viewed this as a precursor to probable closing and in fact several agencies did.

authentic identity is bound to its community, the agency, more than the denominational body, has a close understanding of community needs. Keenly aware of the concerns that Chester residents face each day, CEI has not lost sight of the critical factors of race, ethnicity, gender, economics, which mitigate against community health. All of CEI's executive directors have considered the community as its congregation, and the agency's purpose as being an authentic servant, encourager, and lifter.¹⁸ The psalmist describes the God who cares as a lifter and restorer: "But you, O LORD, are a shield around me, my glory, and the one who lifts up my head" (Psalm 3:3)."¹⁹ CEI acts to lift the situation and the spirit of its community.

REALITY

When I assumed leadership during the last quarter of 2016, I created a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis, which I presented in a Board Meeting in January 2017.²⁰ The findings revealed the strengths and weaknesses of CEI; financial instability was a major threat for the length of my tenure, and programs were operating below best practices. Though the agency was not yet in the worst circumstances, it was nearing a dangerous precipice. Over the next year and a half, new volunteers with various experiences and skills joined the organization in key Board member and advisory volunteer leadership roles. I was convinced that the agency could grow and transform. I could understand what theorists meant when they adopted the

¹⁸ Peter Weaver, Lecture on "Transformational Leadership" presented to DMIN 952 Leading Transformational Ministry, January 30, 2020.

¹⁹ The Common English Bible paraphrases the verse " But you, LORD, are my shield! You are my glory! You are the one who **restores** me." CEI offers hope for all who come for assistance, regardless of history or circumstance.

²⁰ See appendix D.

stance that “there is no such thing as a dysfunctional organization because every organization is perfectly aligned to achieve the results it currently gets.”²¹ CEI held periodic meetings with the Presbytery, still its major funding source, to highlight changes occurring under the new leadership and the agency’s potential for continuing growth. CEI had extended its collaborations in the community, created a new nutrition initiative which attracted participation from a university as well as the local health system; both involved new partnerships. The agency incorporated evidence-based practices into its programs all in less than three years. By mid-2018, CEI learned that funding from the denomination would decrease to a new low. We thought we were “minding the gap between values and actions and values and reality”²² because of our ongoing dialogue. Painfully, the Board and I came to understand that the Presbytery no longer had a shared vision of CEI’s viability despite its achievements. CEI did not accept the premise that it could not “live out its most cherished values with vibrancy and effectiveness in a changing context.”²³ Each organization had its own set of priorities.

Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Glashow, and Marty Linsky, in their text, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, suggest that in a competitive environment, leaders must make strategic decisions and in resolving key issues, win-win solutions are rarely compatible with strategic choices.²⁴ The Board and I spent countless hours endeavoring to justify the rationale for continuation of CEI’s mission status within the Presbytery. An ongoing

²¹ Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Glashow, Marty Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 17.

²² Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 88.

²³ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 44.

²⁴ Heifetz, et al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 81.

problem centered around funding CEI operations. CEI with its own nonprofit designation was expected to be solely responsible for its expenses; however, the Presbytery continued to administer the agency payroll and benefits for CEI. CEI had a limited donor base and few outside grants to support its modest budget. When the small agency fell behind in taking care of the payroll costs (which the Presbytery had already advanced) the Presbytery continued to write checks for the staff salaries. Over several years, the debt exceeded \$100,000. In 2018, after lengthy negotiations between CEI and church officials, the Presbytery Board of Trustees forgave the entire debt.²⁵ The CEI Board and I were relieved.

Now having experienced an adaptive challenge, the Board of Directors was relieved to have shed “certain entrenched ways ... generating the new capacity to thrive anew.”²⁶ However, the move to independence proceeded without a significant change in practice. The agency struggled with infrastructure and systems issues. Technology was limited. Administrative support staff did not exist. I struggled with obtaining routine financial reports while CEI programs received well-deserved recognition, and money from new sources flowed into the organization. The Board was mildly optimistic about the future, and I was gaining more clarity about my role and responsibility in the unfolding new dynamic. We began a re-analysis of the organization, its stakeholders, constituencies, and my role, which was critical to understanding the next phase of challenges. It was important that I shift the paradigm and see my responsibility as

²⁵ This discussion is not intended to reflect negatively on a treasured relationship between CEI and the Presbytery. The relationship has had peaks and valleys over its 35-year history. The denomination has many priorities and has indicated that reduced congregational giving has impacted its ability to continue directly funding missions like CEI.

²⁶ Heifetz, et al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 19.

steering the organization rather than acting as its central caretaker. I moved toward seeing myself more appropriately as a system within a system with my own “default settings.”²⁷

²⁸ For example, I had few boundaries in my life. I carried the weight of the agency and every detail about its daily operations. I worked many hours both days, nights, holidays and weekends. I thought about CEI constantly. My family complained that I was always on my phone.²⁹ Coming to these realizations significantly impacted what occurred next.

In the last quarter of FY 2019, a new treasurer and I presented a budget reconciliation and financial projections for FY 2020. CEI is a low budget organization. The projections were daunting. The organization expected a significant shortfall. The Board met in emergency sessions to address the problem, which was a continuation of the same issue that had plagued CEI for three decades – insufficient funds to cover services. At the beginning of February 2020, The Executive Board voted to convene a Special Board Meeting to propose the dissolution of the agency.

After prayer and reconsideration of Matthew 25, in conversation with the Board Chairman, I requested time to present a second proposal to the Board for an agency restructuring rather than closure. Both choices would be difficult. Heifetz, et al., state:

²⁷ Heifetz, et al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 177-179.

²⁸ I created a diagram of my place within the organization. In a focus group with Board, staff, volunteers, and community members, one participant discussed the Executive Director’s role as a “Subaltern Functionary,” which is the word used in Wilderson’s book. The diagram, conversation and description created a monumental shift in intention and action as to how I would carry the burden of leadership. See appendix B: CEI Stakeholder Sustainability. I do not believe that the Board supported my perspective.

²⁹ My husband, mother, and sister joined in what sounded like a cacophony. They were convinced that my life was becoming more imbalanced. They grew concerned about my well-being and were adamant in their criticisms of the Board. They believed that the culture of the organization and the expectations of the Board were growing toxic. On the other hand, I believed I was led to CEI, and I was certain that I could work with the Board and resolve the challenges.

“Tough decisions require you to put your heart into them, nourish the possibilities, and then make a commitment to a course of action.”³⁰ Though I was conscious of the challenges the agency faced, the reality of people being hungry, children not getting academic support, and others not knowing where to turn for help were not options, in my view. I believed if we spent our last cent helping, that would be what God intended us to do.

Restructuring could help us sort out longer-term options. The Board adopted my plan at the same meeting. The plan would change the agency personnel structure and my position.³¹ I took a courageous stance not knowing whether the restructuring would succeed or fail. I willingly adopted an experimental mindset, and I recognized the risks of my idea. The results could be disappointing. However, giving up would leave a small loyal staff devastated; children and families disoriented and without food; that was not an option.

We managed restructuring with care. Each staff member met with me individually to discuss the agency’s financial situation and its impact on operations. I advised staff members that all positions would change, including the position of Executive Director. I made them aware that there would be fewer staff hours, and benefits discontinued. While that news was hard to deliver, staff seemed to accept it well. They reported that they felt respected and received answers to their questions. Everyone agreed to remain with CEI.

³⁰ Heifetz, et al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*. e-book. location 4316.

³¹ The Plan was adopted by the Board of Directors on February 10, 2020. The new structure went into place on March 11, 2020.

I also met individually with key supporting foundations and community leaders to discuss new relationship paradigms including transitioning programs to other agencies. I wrote announcements for churches and the public I also met with the Presbytery to obtain their buy-in regarding the messaging. It was important to publish accurate information without blaming the denomination for the agency's economic downturn. The new structure went into place on March 11, 2020.

While the agency was moving toward restructuring, we had been previously invited by Swarthmore College to join a delegation to Oahu, Hawaii. The purpose was to learn how Indigenous Hawaiians had united to create a social enterprise in one of the poorest communities in America.

The grand experiment of MA'O Farms was inspiring and sparked conversation about what could be possible in Chester. The goal was to learn how MA'O, a small community-based organization, used their position as organic farmers to become a thriving social enterprise. MA'O is in Oahu in the Wai'anāe region. The population is made up of 60 percent native Hawaiians, the largest in the entire state and the world. Historically a vibrant community, it is now one of the poorest communities in the nation characterized by decades of intergenerational poverty and lack of opportunity. The mission of the enterprise is to reclaim the land and develop programming to mentor, educate and empower youth.³² MA'O has succeeded in creating many partnerships with area farm market vendors, restaurants, and health networks to sell its products. Most recently they have collaborated with the University of Hawaii to develop a college curriculum for young people referred by MA'O Farms. The excursion was outstanding! It

³² MA'O Organic Farms, <https://www.maoorganicfarms.org>.

was an experience that expanded my vision of how CEI could begin to position itself for an expanded role in the Chester community. I looked forward to sharing what I had seen in Hawaii. How would I bring my insights to CEI? Would the Board of Directors be amenable to exploring how CEI might move beyond the programs that had been our mainstay? Might they embrace the idea that we could expand our services and raise money to sustain them? I was anxious to share my thoughts with the Board which had reluctantly agreed to my travel. However, the board never allowed time for an in-depth discussion about the trip. I had no recourse for their lack of engagement. I was “an observer and an actor.”³³ Deciding on “the ripe time” to return to the Hawaii trip discussion would require a strategy. The adaptive leader is “strategically conscious” of their role and willing to forego investment in their idea.³⁴ Listening to the fears and concerns of the team are critical to sustaining the emotional balance for the organization.³⁵

The leader is scrutinized, criticized, quarterbacked and treated like a “subaltern functionary” at the expense of time with God, family and friends. I drew a crude diagram illustrating how embedded I had become in the life of CEI.³⁶ I attempted to internalize

³³ Heifetz, et al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 35.

³⁴ Heifetz, et al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*. ebook. location 2230.

³⁵ Heifetz, et al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*. ebook. location 2139.

³⁶ See appendix B. I began considering this idea as I sat in a class at Drew University, DMIN902: Theological Methods for Ministry, taught by Dr. Sara Rosenau in August 2019. I presented the idea again at a convening of CEI Board and community members in early fall, the same year. The diagram was even more compelling as the focus group, and I discussed the long-term stability of CEI. The diagram clearly showed the massive weight on the Executive Director which led a group member to describe my role as that of a “subaltern functionary.”

Heifetz, et al.'s advice to take myself out of discussions and observe from the balcony.

The words of Peter Scazzero brought comfort to me:

Know that God invited you to take only one step at a time,
One day at a time. God also understands that growth and
change take time ... God sees your present leadership context
and challenges and [God] knows what you need --- not only to
meet the challenges but to grow into a stronger leader because of them.³⁷

Coming to understand that “adaptive leadership is about “letting go, learning as we go,
and keeping going,”³⁸ I continued to lead CEI with a new mantra.

³⁷ Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 43.

³⁸ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 88.

CHAPTER THREE

SCARCITY AND POVERTY

Economists Sendhil Mullainathan and Eldar Shafir have identified three essential elements regarding scarcity. First, they define scarcity as a mindset. Secondly, they develop the idea of scarcity creating scarcity and finally, designing for scarcity. Theirs is a pragmatic approach to addressing the impact of scarcity and its control over our thoughts and actions. Scarcity is defined as “having less than you think you need.”¹ This is particularly fascinating because that basic concept intersects with different facets of life. The authors suggest that “[scarcity]forms a common chord across so many of society’s problems. These problems occur in different cultures, economic conditions, and political systems, but they all feature scarcity.”²

The Bible reveals the impact of scarcity during antiquity. Jesus’ declaration that God cares for the flowers and the birds was a simplistic response. He did not focus on scarcity. It is interesting that as Jesus spoke to his disciples, he separated them from the Gentiles in their faith. Segregation was not based on race but upon mindset. Jesus’ assertion conveys the necessity for his disciples to rely on God for the scarcity in their lives, both physical and spiritual. Mullainathan and Shafir argue that “scarcity affects our thinking and leads to focus on only one area to the exclusion of many others.”³ Scarcity is

¹ Sendhil Mullainathan and Eldar Shafir, *Scarcity: Why Having Too Little Means so Much* (New York, NY: Times Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2013), 4.

² Mullainathan and Shafir, *Scarcity*, 5.

³ Mullainathan and Shafir, *Scarcity*, 7.

more than just the displeasure of having little. It changes how we think. It imposes itself on our minds. Our experience of scarcity helps inform our thinking about the poor.

Poor people may focus on isolated aspects of their conditions, whether money or food or housing or transportation or health. In my experience in the nonprofit arena, the poor may articulate one need at a time. However, when a person receives assistance in one area, the general assumption is that everything else should be better. When it is not, the giver determines that the individual's situation is hopeless. Jesus declared that the disciples should not respond from their own senses of hopelessness but rather from their capacity (John 6:13). Jesus urged them to think outside of the circumstance to fully understand the need that was before them. Their only instruction was to feed the people. It is an interesting dichotomy because each group experienced a scarcity mindset. The crowd was hungry and fatigued; the disciples overwhelmed and incapable of overseeing the situation. The verse illustrates the collision of mindsets.

Mullainathan and Shafir suggest that culture, economic forces, and personality are significant in any discussion regarding poverty.⁴ However, the overriding feature is a scarcity mindset. They emphasize that scarcity “operates on top of these other forces.”⁵ While scarcity can be stifling, it can also serve as the impetus for launching creative energy; lack does not always have devastating consequences.⁶

For example, in Acts 6:1-7 the need of the Grecian women was obvious. Scarcity in this passage is based on factors including gender, age, race and marital status. There

⁴ Mullainathan and Shafir, *Scarcity*, 14.

⁵ Mullainathan and Shafir, *Scarcity*, 14.

⁶ Mullainathan and Shafir, *Scarcity*, 20.

may have been others who were in need, but the scarcity that came to the attention of the disciples was that of a particular group of women. The apparently easy approach would have been for the disciples to stop handling the business of the entire church to address the specific needs of a few. While that may seem like the best method for the leaders to show care, it would be short lived. Instead, the leaders empowered the body of believers to create a plan to tackle the need. When the discernment process was finished, the solution was implemented and has stood the test of time. The diaconate is essential in congregational life because they survey the needs of the community.

For faith leaders, it is important to adopt a perspective that a need can be a springboard to creative action and scarcity can spawn creativity. Mullainathan and Shafir argue that scarcity captures the mind. According to the authors, it “happens unavoidably and beyond our control.”⁷

Poverty has interested me throughout my life and career. I am troubled by society’s emphasis upon the material side of life and the mindset that equates the intellectual, the healthy, and the moral with wealth. That mindset gives permission to the society to relegate the poor, weak, and disabled into categories that diminish their personhood and agency. From antiquity, there is evidence that people have found ways to separate from one another.

In the Hebrew Bible, Abraham and Lot are a nomadic tribe that settled, unsettled, and resettled often. Lot, his nephew, along with their wives, families and livestock set out to create a new life. When they finally located a place to live, Lot selected first. He was driven by personal avarice to choose the best and most fertile location. However, the best

⁷ Mullainathan and Shafir, *Scarcity*, 26.

land turned out to be in a community rife with violence. Ultimately, Lot lost his wife, possessions, and spiritual peace. Focusing on personal needs is not a new phenomenon. Even when living in community with loved ones, there were separations among family units, which is evident in Abraham and Lot's situation (Gen. 13:9-12).

In ancient history, the word, "familia" (family), included all persons under "the authority of the paterfamilias."⁸ Though not necessarily the biological father, the paterfamilias was the authority over the household as sanctioned by Roman law. Roman law divided the family into three levels first, children, "potestas," which include adopted children, grandchildren, and slaves; secondly, "manus," which meant power over the wife and son's wives; and third, "dominium," power over "his" possessions. M.I. Finley emphasizes that this paradigm is the basis for patriarchies and the design for peasant households because the head managed the people and the property of the group. This mindset became the basis for European society into the 18th century.⁹

The ancients were specific regarding wealth. Genesis 13 states, "Abraham was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold.... Now Lot, who went with Abraham, also had flocks and herds and tents, so that the land could not support both living together; for their possessions were so great that they could not live together" (Gen. 13:1-7)." Job is also described as wealthy and righteous: "That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. He had seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of

⁸ M.I. Finley, *The Ancient Economy*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), 18.

⁹ Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 19.

oxen, five hundred donkeys, and very many servants; so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east.” (Job 1:1-3). Greatness, as it related to Job, emphasized his wealth and his moral compass (he was blameless and upright), and devoted to God (he feared God and turned away from evil). This is noteworthy since Finley hypothesizes that the paterfamilias exercised control over the household without distinction to economic, personal, or social behavior. Finley believes that wealth in antiquity was “fundamentally unequivocal and uncomplicated.”¹⁰

Ancients believed that wealth was necessary for a good life. According to Finley, Odysseus asserts in *The Odyssey* that it would be an advantage to return home with more wealth to assure that he would “be more revered and loved among men.”¹¹ Yet, Finley points out, Socrates and Plato opposed the concept of the essentiality of riches, with Socrates asserting that “wealth was neither essential nor even helpful in achieving a good life”¹² and Plato objecting to his followers having property.¹³

The conversation about wealth in antiquity focused on the paterfamilia (head of household) and his possessions. In the litany of material things, children, wives, and slaves are possessions; there is no mention of the poor. Ancient philosophers spoke to the benefits of poverty. History credits Apuleius with the idea that poverty is the “handmaiden of philosophy” and “the founder of states, the inventor of the arts.”¹⁴ The

¹⁰ Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 35.

¹¹ Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 36.

¹² Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 36.

¹³ Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 36.

¹⁴ Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 36.

idea that the poor could contribute to society was inconsistent with thinking and behavior in ancient civilizations. Finley states:

Fundamentally, however, “Blessed are the poor” was not within the Graeco-Roman world of ideas, and its appearance in the Gospels ... points to another world and another set of values. That world eventually achieved a paradoxical ideology, in which a fiercely acquisitive temper was accompanied by strains of asceticism and holy poverty....¹⁵

Thus, early societies created stratifications based upon economics. The message of the early Christians clashed with the social and economic ideologies and practices of the times. For example, in early Jerusalem the wealthy lived extravagantly, and their conspicuous consumption was on full display. They pointed to their pampered wives, lavish homes and country estates, magnificent clothing, large offerings to the temple, and huge banquets. Slave ownership also figured heavily into the wealth equation.¹⁶

Jerusalem attracted wealthy bankers, tax collectors, and landowners, some who were members of the Sanhedrin. The priesthood itself was part of the wealth versus poverty context. The priestly aristocracy was not dependent on the income from the Temple treasury because the “high-priestly office had to possess private means.”¹⁷ However, Joachim Jeremias cites examples of priests sending their representatives to the workplaces of their members to “collect the tithes.”¹⁸ Royal palatial estates dominated

¹⁵ Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 38.

¹⁶ Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: An Investigation into Economic and Social Conditions during the New Testament Period*. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2019), 97.

¹⁷ Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, 98.

¹⁸ Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, 98.

Jerusalem and magnificent buildings added to the extravagance of the monarchy all of which was in full view for the populace to see.¹⁹

The middle class consisted of merchants, traders, retailers, and craftsmen. Business had close links to the Temple. Pilgrims traveled to Jerusalem with their sacrificial animals. During the festivals, pilgrims lived in places surrounding the Temple, places which were illegal according to the Law. The businesspeople (hosts in most cases) demanded the skin and hides of the animals before they were sacrificed, which they then sold and made profits. Businesspeople also ran catering services and taverns. During festivals pilgrims ate and drank and enjoyed time in Jerusalem. Historical documents reveal that during Passover, travelers “feasted seven whole days and spared no expense.”²⁰ During the Feast, the Temple gained money for its treasury – some of which went to social welfare; the fund was under the control of the High Priests.²¹

The practice of the second tithe carried an expectation that any money that the pilgrims brought with them was to be spent in the City of Jerusalem during their visit. Thus, clothing purchases and souvenirs and gifts for the Temple were also big business. While the priestly aristocracy prospered, regular priests, who were part of the middle class, did not fare as well unless they were descendants from prominent priestly families. Priests were “regarded as belonging to the middle classes. Most of the ordinary priests lived in various places throughout the land and were divided into twenty-four courses. Those who lived in Jerusalem seem to have reached a higher level of wealth and

¹⁹ Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, 92.

²⁰ Richard A. Horsley, *Covenant Economics: A Biblical Vision of Justice for All* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 86.

²¹ Horsley, *Covenant Economics*, 86.

education...”²² The fact that religious life mimicked the monarchy and the wealthy is troublesome. Attention to the physical or spiritual needs of the populace seem to have not been a priority. Wealthy society was self-centered and less interested in those of lower economic status. The poor were separated according to three categories: slaves, laborers, and subsidized groups. Jeremias points out that our ideas about the poor are sketchy due to little available data. However, he offers that we “must distinguish between those of the poor who earned their own living and those who lived, either partly or wholly, on relief.”²³ The wealthy and the poor are at either end of the economic spectrum. There was a Middle Class in ancient history which connected both the poor and the rich. The middle class fared better when aligned with The Temple and its pilgrims. The idea of covenant was to a large degree abandoned. Richard Horsley claims that no separation existed among economics, politics and religion.²⁴ According to Finley, Jesus understood that attention to the poor was not a priority in antiquity because “the very poor aroused little sympathy and no pity.”²⁵

The poor were the other side of a status-based social system. Because they had no wealth, the poor were invisible. Pericles is believed to have remarked: “Neither is poverty a bar, but a man may benefit his city whatever the obscurity of his condition.”²⁶ That perspective was an outlier in the society’s view of the poor. People from poor

²² Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, 57.

²³ Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, 110.

²⁴ Horsley, *Covenant Economics*, 84.

²⁵ Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 39.

²⁶ Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 37.

backgrounds did not take part in the leadership of their communities. Money and politics were driving forces in these earlier societies.

The first century, the “Age of Cicero,” was characterized by conspicuous consumption, moneylending, electoral bribery, expensive lifestyle, and public games all in the interest of achieving and maintaining political power.²⁷ Officials risked heavy debt, anxiety, and bankruptcy.²⁸ Given the nature of the political structure that characterized the society and the temple, Jesus’ unequivocal response that poverty would always exist was his commentary on society.

The invisible poor were divided into intersecting categories. The basic socio-economic groupings from which all the categories flow were the *plutos* and the *penia*. The *plutos* were the wealthy, and wealth was a necessary condition for personal freedom and leisure. The designation connotes that the man does not live under constraints created by another person. The wealthy could live well on their income.²⁹ *Penia* was the class associated with the poor who were unable to live on what they earned; they had no surplus. They had, according to Finley, a “harsh compulsion to toil.”³⁰

The discussion of the two social categories revolves around work and its expectations. Land ownership in antiquity “marked the absence of an occupation, and wage labor did not classify as an occupation.”³¹ Neither pole of the social continuum was

²⁷ Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 53.

²⁸ Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 53.

²⁹ Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 40.

³⁰ Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 40.

³¹ Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 44.

concerned about occupations. Early moralists condemned occupations such as tax collectors, money lenders, those who work for wages, craftsmen, fishmongers, butchers, cooks, fishers, perfumers, dancers, performers, and re-sellers.³²

Well below the *penia* class were extensive slave classes. The categories and the ways in which they intersect are complicated which gives contemporary readers a glance into the significance of social classes during antiquity. Slaves were property and could be sold, leased, stolen, beaten, branded, and made to produce children sired by freedmen, the children of which would be considered free. Slaves could be subdivided into other categories: The Helots, Slaves with *Peculia*, and Debt Bondsmen. Helots lived in Greece (Sparta). They were servants who worked on the great estates. They were not the property of an individual and they could not be bought or sold. They were attached to the land and could never be freed except by the State. Helots could have their own possessions which could be transferred to others.³³

Some slaves received grants that could be used to purchase property, used toward purchasing their freedom, or buying other slaves or farm workers.³⁴ Slavery was so embedded that slaves who received a *peculium*, such as the craftsmen, pawn brokers, money lenders, and shopkeepers, could use these to purchase other slaves or free wage earners. The slave with the *peculium* could hire a wage earner; the hiring slave determined the amount of time a task needed and the amount of compensation. Other slaves were members of the involuntary slave force which would include the helots or

³² Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 42.

³³ Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 63.

³⁴ Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 64.

serfs and the debt bondsmen.³⁵ The legal system allowed for two poles on the social continuum leading to complete freedom: from a person as property, a slave, up to the perfectly free man. Finley comments: “Absolute freedom is an idle dream, and it would be psychologically intolerable. Neither has ever existed.”³⁶

As slavery continued beyond antiquity, there is evidence that captors imported slaves from places in Eastern Europe, Asia Minor, Syria, and Gaul, which led to a further “depression of status” in lower classes.³⁷ Both the Hebrew and Greek scriptures mention slavery. Christianity influenced its decline but not its abolition.³⁸

Another level of the poor developed in antiquity called the “Holy Poor.” The Apostle Paul considered himself “holy poor” on some level. He raised collections to support the poor in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:26), and he also argued fiercely about the degree to which “apostles and other leaders (like himself) might claim support from the local Christian communities.”³⁹ Paul taught that work was the expectation when he wrote to the church at Thessalonica (2 Thess. 3:10); he also taught that those who “had sown spiritual good” should receive material support (1 Cor. 9:11). These ideas sparked a controversy in the church and wider society. The growth of monastic communities with their numinous qualities were comprised of individuals and groups who were poverty-stricken in a religious sense. They relinquished (abandoned) their usual work in favor of a

³⁵ Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 64-65.

³⁶ Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 67.

³⁷ Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 87.

³⁸ Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 92.

³⁹ Peter Brown, *Treasure in Heaven: The Holy Poor in Early Christianity* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2016), xiii.

life of contemplation and prayer on behalf of others. Convents and monasteries developed; some were self-supporting while others depended on the charity of others.⁴⁰ The thinking behind supporting religious poor was to place treasure in heaven. This idea conflicted with the Roman work ethic. The Roman concern was how to maintain a work force when a privileged few could rise to higher status because they received support by the labor of others. Another issue became how to respond to the “real poor” and determine how to divide money between the literally poor and the holy poor.⁴¹ The sense that individuals would achieve heavenly treasure by giving away their earthly goods was foreign to the Romans.

Peter Brown suggests that laying up treasure was not uniquely Christian for it was embraced by segments of the Jewish community.⁴² These ideas met severe criticism from pagan philosophers who believed that the idea “must have been invented by poor people, with the intention of persuading the rich to give all their money to them...”⁴³ Jesus brought together two incommensurables that were attractive to the early Christian Communities. The “communities found, in the idea of the joining of heaven and earth and rich and poor, an expression of solidarity across real (or imagined) social cleavages.”⁴⁴ The discussion of rich versus poor did not accentuate the place of wealthy Christians in the community. Brown suggests that among Christians the gulf between rich and poor

⁴⁰ Brown, *Treasure in Heaven*, xiv.

⁴¹ Brown, *Treasure in Heaven*, 11.

⁴² Brown, *Treasure in Heaven*, 2.

⁴³ Brown, *Treasure in Heaven*, 3.

⁴⁴ Brown, *Treasure in Heaven*, ebook. location 328.

was not necessarily large.⁴⁵ There was great suspicion about Jesus' radical theology because his followers sought to break down societal barriers that separated people. As the community developed, questions of how to balance help for the poor and paying religious leaders became more complex.⁴⁶

Jesus promised treasure in heaven to those who renounced their possessions. He urged his listeners to see themselves as community not defined by economic status and societal labels. Paul also viewed money as a resource for helping the poor among the saints as well as to support the religious leaders.⁴⁷ Paul rallied churches for financial support for the poor who lived in Jerusalem. In time, help for the poor shifted from Jerusalem to other communities.

Christian charity differed from Roman practice. Christians looked for ways to distribute to the needy. Brown suggests that they looked to their Jewish neighbors for insight. Christians' reputations as "bearers of a potent and compelling counterculture" was important to them.⁴⁸ In the same way the rabbis exercised caution to ensure that their gifts to the poor "did not carry the weight of obligation associated with normal gift giving."⁴⁹

In the early second century, the church wanted to exercise more control over donors and their donations. It proposed to centralize almsgiving and place them in the

⁴⁵ Brown, *Treasure in Heaven*, 6.

⁴⁶ Brown, *Treasure in Heaven*, 23.

⁴⁷ Brown, *Treasure in Heaven*, 24.

⁴⁸ Brown, *Treasure in Heaven*, 24.

⁴⁹ Brown, *Treasure in Heaven*, 24.

hands of the bishop and his clergy.⁵⁰ The bishops created an elaborate plan to prevent donors from giving directly to the poor. The new procedure would have alms brought “first to the altar and then distributed by the bishop alone, through his priests and deacons.”⁵¹ A veil of secrecy was to surround the donor and the gift:

The poor who received these alms might be told the names of the donors. But they would be told in secret. In this way, the poor could offer intercessory prayer for their benefactors without publicizing their names in the community at large. By doing this, they avoided raising public esteem for individual rich givers. Secrecy also ensured that the poor did not mark themselves out in public as personally obligated to any particular donor.⁵²

In this new paradigm, the obligation of the poor was that of a sanctuary, a place of offering themselves and praying to God alone, untouched by earthly ties to rich donors.⁵³ Donors would then fulfill Jesus’ mandate to “lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven” (Matt. 6:20).⁵⁴

This movement toward the bishop receiving the alms is akin to what had transpired in the Jewish Temple. Donations came under the supervision of the priests, and the bishop determined how they would be distributed. The new paradigm provided potential for corruption. The poor became the impetus for fundraising, but the focus moved away from the needs of the poor. Instead, there was a growing emphasis on a new way for the church to amass wealth.

⁵⁰ Brown, *Treasure in Heaven*, 24.

⁵¹ Brown, *Treasure in Heaven*, 24.

⁵² Brown, *Treasure in Heaven*, 24.

⁵³ Brown, *Treasure in Heaven*, 24.

⁵⁴ Brown, *Treasure in Heaven*, 24.

By the third century, the church had become a social and political instrument embroiled in the fabric of secular society. Politics in the Episcopacy were rife with corruption as the clergy, though already in positions of honor with financial rewards, took bribes and campaigned “to curry favor with rich donors.”⁵⁵ Brown, quoting Origen of Alexandria, infers “if Christ were to return to earth to witness the behavior of the modern laity and clergy, he would have wept over the church as he once wept over the sinful city of Jerusalem.”⁵⁶ As the Roman Empire spread, the growth of religious thought increased and replaced “the traditional monopoly of cults upheld by the upper classes.”⁵⁷ Curiosity among the labor classes sparked religious conversation throughout the empire:

We must never overlook the sheer zest that average persons in the late classical period in the second and third centuries – pagans, Jews, and Christians alike – put into the pursuit of religion. This pursuit of religion was not driven by an ill-defined religious fervor. It expressed an intellectual hunger – a hunger to understand things divine whose power and widespread nature have come as a surprise to historians of the late classical world. There were also many religious groups (and not least the Christians) who had developed systems of support that left increasing numbers of persons (many of whom did not come from the leisured upper classes) free to talk about religion all the time.⁵⁸

As the thinkers expanded, so did their financial support. Brown points out:

Alongside the ordinary poor, striking figures of “the holy poor” (administrators, teachers, and individual exemplars of heroic virtue—would be martyrs, ascetics, and virgins) had already laid claim on the pockets of the faithful. They were the beneficiaries of the tension between

⁵⁵ Brown, *Treasure in Heaven*, 27.

⁵⁶ Brown, *Treasure in Heaven*, 27.

⁵⁷ Brown, *Treasure in Heaven*, 29.

⁵⁸ Brown, *Treasure in Heaven*, 29.

the “real” poor and the “holy” poor that we have traced since the days of Saint Paul.⁵⁹

The suspicion attached to the poor has not abated. In my decades’ long experience as a nonprofit executive, my focus is always on the judicious use of donations. We establish metrics and methods to track them with a goal of justifying the “good” that the money does. Often, donors and boards believe that there is a linear correlation between fundraising and transformational change. In distributing food at CEI, the sentiment of some of our most involved volunteers was that the availability of healthy food would translate to healthy diets, better nutrition and altered lifestyles. Donors were happy to offer food but disappointed that their ideas about metrics were unmet. Often I was asked whether the same families return for help. The reality is that the donors and the recipients were from different worlds, world that are normally not in communication. Participants could be homeless, near homeless, or heads of single parent families. Given the demographics of Chester, our clients might not have finished high school in the sub-par educational system and if employed, they would be among the working poor. The political, social, and racial divides mitigate the food recipient’s focus on preventative health. A similar scenario happens when considering funding for youth programs. Invariably funders want to gauge success by number of participants, improvement in academic scores and involvement in enrichment activities. However, there is little understanding about the politics and racism that maintain Chester schools at the lowest educational levels. The trauma that students and their families experience is unfamiliar to the givers. Thus, in a helping organization we have discussed the challenges between the

⁵⁹ Brown, *Treasure in Heaven*, 34-35.

leader and the Board when the concept of intersectionality is not understood. In these scenarios like these, I was the intermediary between all sectors. I spoke the language of each population in order to convey the depth of a client's struggles. My audiences were the Board and its committees, funding agencies and foundations, politicians, and churches. Comparing my role to that of a bishop (cleric) in antiquity, my focus was on amassing funds for CEI activities. I routinely juggled questions of intersectionality, socio-economic status, race, and theology.

In the next chapter, we will focus on Jesus' words, which Horsley terms a covenant renewal.⁶⁰ Jesus' focus is on those desperately indebted, hungry, and worried about bare subsistence. His is not a philosophical discussion about poverty and suffering. Rather, "Jesus speaks as a prophet, like Moses of Old, pronouncing the blessings of God's imminent action of deliverance, the coming of God's direct rule for Galilean and other villagers. That he pronounces woes on the wealthy suggests that there is a relationship between the poverty of the poor and the wealth of the wealthy."⁶¹ His fundamental concern was to restore the viability of each family and to call into account those who created the systems which led to poverty and hunger. Contemporary followers of the Covenant are still required to actualize Christ's call for justice.

⁶⁰ Horsley, *Covenant Economics*, 109.

⁶¹ Horsley, *Covenant Economics*, 109.

CHAPTER FOUR
ERASURE OR INTERSECTIONALITY?

When I met the Reverend Doctor W.T. DeLaine, I was about 11 years old. Dr. DeLaine was my father's beloved childhood pastor who came to Philadelphia to conduct a revival. He preached with tremendous power. His quiet fervor and authority were compelling and touched my young heart. My interest in and understanding of the Bible was a bit precocious. I engaged in conversation with Dr. DeLaine as we waited for Mother and Daddy to prepare dinner.

Awestruck by his command of language, when Dr. DeLaine spoke, I felt ashamed. I often spoke less articulately, and I knew better. I acted out of deference to my socio-cultural context. My parents and most others in our community were uneducated. Often, I spoke like those around me. Dr. DeLaine called out my tendency to adapt to others. I shall never forget that he said I should stand on what I knew, unintimidated by what others did not know or accept. He encouraged and admonished me to stand proud of who I was and grasp what my future could be. Why that story returns to my memory now is significant to my learning in this process of study.

In her book, *The Overshadowed Preacher*, Jerusha Matsen Neal states: "The Christian leader's tremendous responsibility is to be open and receptive to Jesus operating through them, in whatever their task, whether teaching or preaching. In chapter one, I mentioned the concerns that I had when attending a mainline seminary. While my theology is conservative, my church is progressive in its view of women in leadership. Even with that reality, I have not always felt comfortable stepping into roles that are

incorporated in my calling. The message from Dr. DeLaine to me was to be honest and be yourself. Do not contort yourself or minimize your gifts and abilities to accommodate others. Offer yourself to help others improve. That was meaningful learning and still relevant decades after his death.

In her course on “Reading Matthew for Societies in Transition,” Professor Althea Spencer-Miller emphasized the idea of relationality in approaching the Bible. She discussed six elements for proper exegesis, which include: particularity (which in this discussion would include gender, race, ethnicity, and social status); using the text and own lived experience to liberate one from overlying colonialism; making exegesis more egalitarian; interacting with the text by placing yourself inside the text; exegeting within community; and recognizing the layers of power. This approach forces the leader to excavate the text beyond the surface, peeling back layers to reveal artifacts buried for thousands of years.¹

Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge provide a succinct and useful definition of intersectionality: “Intersectionality investigates how intersecting power relations influence social relations across diverse societies as well as individual experiences in everyday life.”² As an analytic tool, intersectionality views categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, class, nation, ability, ethnicity, and age as inter-related and mutually shaping one another. Intersectionality is a way of understanding and explaining complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences.³ An intersectional

¹ Notes from Dr. Althea Spencer-Miller in DMIN 930 Reading Matthew for Societies in Transition, May 18-22, 2020, Drew University, School of Theology.

² Collins and Bilge, *Intersectionality*, 2.

³ Collins and Bilge, *Intersectionality*, 2.

approach broadens interpretation of scripture by placing it in the context of the culture: “Using intersectionality as an analytical tool provides a powerful way of analyzing how intersecting power relations produce social inequalities.”⁴ Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Susan Shaw suggest that using intersectionality as an analytical tool in theology could expand our theologies and enhance our understanding of God, as well as complicate our readings of the biblical text and its applications to the contemporary life of faith.⁵ Doing intersectional theology requires reading, rereading, researching the structural, cultural, and interpersonal domains of power in addition to categories which include gender, economics, racial, and age. This approach to developing purposeful hermeneutics forces the exegete to recognize and untangle herself from bias. Neal says “Preaching is a messy bodily business. There are no easy answers or catchall formulas. Preaching takes place in a material world subject to our interpretation even as it confronts and interprets us.”⁶ It is incumbent on the preacher or teacher to find help outside of to preach, teach, and live the Word of God.

I agree with Neal that traditions and narratives often replace Christ’s standing. She cautions against losing Protestant tension “[by leaving] behind the limits, vulnerabilities, and beauties of embodied life. And, in so doing, [obscuring] preachers’ need for a very different shadow: the shadow of the Spirit.”⁷ She is concerned “the Spirit

⁴ Collins and Bilge, *Intersectionality*, 225.

⁵ Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Susan M. Shaw, *Intersectional Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2018), 65.

⁶ Jerusha Matsen Neal, *The Overshadowed Preacher: Mary, The Spirit, And The Labor Of Proclamation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2020), 56.

⁷ Neal, *The Overshadowed Preacher*, 59.

is underplayed as an afterthought, outsourced to an ecclesial body, or located within the skill set of a gifted speaker.”⁸ Neal goes on to remind the reader, “Ours is a world of uneasy borders. We live in a season marked by global migrations, religious and nationalistic violence, and the hegemony of a larger-than-life economy... Borders of race and gender, once thought self-evident, have been reconfigured... Human agency seems overrun by discourses of power.”⁹ If Neal’s assumptions are accurate, what place does the Bible have for the Christian leader/ preacher? The central theme of Gospel preaching is that “... by the Spirit’s power Jesus is in the room when preachers preach the Word. He is embodied – not as tradition, words on a page, but as himself, risen, and reigning.”¹⁰

Since Jesus is with me as I lead, Jesus knows everything about me. I have no excuse or apology regarding who I am – including my race, gender, family background, and social status. I use all of those characteristics to understand and address power dynamics. It is critical that I am aware of these factors to minimize bias that could derail my leadership. However, gender and race are intrinsic. My aspiration is to use the power of all I am, anointed by the Holy Spirit, to use intersectional theology as a tool for interpreting the Bible.

EXEGESIS

Acts 6:1-7

Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. Therefore,

⁸ Neal, *The Overshadowed Preacher*, 59.

⁹ Neal, *The Overshadowed Preacher*, 20.

¹⁰ Neal, *The Overshadowed Preacher*, 37.

friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word.” What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

The context of this pericope is Pentecost. On that day, people from all over the known world were gathered in Jerusalem, and the Holy Spirit descended. People praised God in their native languages – all of them in the same space. What a cacophony of unified difference!

In verse one, the disciples were together waiting with expectation. Jesus had directed them to “wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:4-5). The Holy Spirit became their empowering agent. However, the excitement diminished and shortly the Church faced its first major problem.

The issue surfaced when the Greeks complained against the Jews. Some women revealed that they were neglected every day when the food was distributed. Cultural differences played a role. Gender, age, and marital status also factored into the interaction. The affected persons were all women. Men, as heads of families, would have brought the matter forward. There is no mention of men complainants in the group.

Some writers have argued that there is a history of erasing women from scripture.¹¹ In ancient times, women were part of the paterfamilia’s possessions.¹² Widows would no longer have the covering of a paterfamilias, thus they were vulnerable.

¹¹ April D. DeConick, *Holy Misogyny: Why Sex and Gender in the Early Church Still Matters* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2013) ebook. location 955.

¹² Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 19.

In covenant economics, widows and orphans were the “poorest of the poor, the most dire of those in need of support. Their plights symbolized the general need of the poor.”¹³ The aged widows and young widows along with their underage children met the criteria for ongoing support. It is noteworthy that Grecian women were overlooked. Culture and race along with gender amplified the slight. Could that have meant that there were few or no Greeks who would have acted on their behalf? Greek and Christian culture might collide since the concept of “blessed are the poor” was common to Jews but an alien idea to the Greeks.¹⁴ The women would need an advocate because it would be uncommon to interact with men other than their husbands or sons. Unless they could get the attention of a leader, they would continue to be unnoticed.

Their concerns reached the leaders in the newly forming community. It is significant that the leaders encouraged the establishment of a new initiative to address the problems. In his seminal work on the holy poor, Brown describes the concept of life in the likeness of angels. Common in ancient thinking was the view that angels were not simply ethereal beings but holy men whose piety caused them to look past the current society gripped by labor to a world without work. Holy men “nourished by the rays of the divine presence, did not labor. They brought into their world a touch of the life of the angels. This was a life of perpetual rapt worship.”¹⁵ The Apostles were acting out their angelic roles: “It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on

¹³ Horsley, *Covenant Economics*, 40.

¹⁴ Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 38.

¹⁵ Brown, *Treasure in Heaven*, 60.

tables” (Acts 6:2). If the needs of the widows were to be met, then a contingent of workers would need to assume those tasks (Acts 6:4).

An essential element of intersectional theology is captured in the apostles’ declaration to “select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task... (Acts 6:4).” They recognized the factors that contributed to inequality in their community; the relationships were important and demanded a both/and approach rather than an either/or approach.¹⁶ Further, the apostles engaged the members and empowered them to assist in problem solving: “... select from among yourselves ...” (Acts 6:3). The new leaders were chosen by the group. The apostles continued their ministry, and the community endorsement followed: “What they said pleased the whole community” (Acts 6:5). The first social problem to impact the church was resolved.

A second pericope from Luke 9:10-17 presents another leadership view. Here, the disciples received instruction from Jesus before going on an assignment to preach the gospel and heal the sick (Luke 9:6). Jesus prepared them to become transformational leaders. Bolsinger opines that “leadership in uncharted territory requires the transformation of the whole organization: both leaders and followers will become vastly different people after they have ventured forth to live out the mission of God in a changing world.”¹⁷ The disciples became adaptive, technical and relational.

¹⁶ Kim and Shaw, *Intersectional Theology*, 9.

¹⁷ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 44.

Technical competence is the first step in transformational leadership. Credibility is an outgrowth of handling basic management skills.¹⁸ Relational congruence is the second tier of transformational leadership, validated through demonstrations of trustworthiness. The final element is adaptive capacity which is “the capacity to lead a process of shifting values, habits and behaviors in order to grow and discover the greatest challenges brought on by a changing world.”¹⁹ Jesus knew that sharing the gospel would be transformative only if the disciples were committed to their own personal transformations.²⁰ The point is that Jesus prepared the disciples beforehand and he gave them power and authority over the problems they were to encounter, such as demons and diseases (Luke 9:1). “Dynamis,” a Greek term used in the passage, connotes strength, ability, and power. In fact, Jesus gave the disciples attributes that were associated with him. He empowered them to perform miracles and transform lives because he, Jesus, had the capacity, control, influence, and sovereignty to share his authority with them. When the disciples followed Jesus' leadership, they were successful.

However, the disciples' technical skills were tested almost immediately after they returned from their assignment. The crowds learned where Jesus and the disciples were secluded, and they followed them. Jesus adapted to the circumstances “and spoke to the crowds about the kingdom of God and healed those who needed to be cured” (Luke 9:11). The disciples, aware that it was late, and the people needed to eat, asked Jesus to send the crowd away. These are the same disciples who have walked with Jesus, taken

¹⁸ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 43.

¹⁹ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 44.

²⁰ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 44.

instruction from him, and had just come back from charting a new course for the transformative gospel. Operating from a scarcity mindset (“we don’t have what we need”), it is ironic that they point out to the Son of Man that they do not have the resources to care for the people! Scarcity imposed itself on their minds. They had less than they felt they needed, but Jesus did not entertain their idea. Instead, he advised them: “You give them something to eat” (Luke 9:13). Still caught up in their scarcity mindsets, they responded: “We have no more than...” The disciples forgot their purpose and instead became overwhelmed by their fears. Jesus directed them in solving the food problem. This passage proves three ways to achieve purposeful leadership.

Purposeful leadership separates the challenge into manageable pieces. First came the instruction: “Make them sit down in groups of about fifty each” (Luke 9:14).” Jesus knew there was a problem and he made it more manageable. He did not want the disciples to focus on the enormity of a crowd of five thousand people but on the smaller groups. His aim was to reach everyone, person by person. Second, purpose is undeterred by limited resources. Jesus took what was available and blessed it. He kept giving to the disciples reminding them each time they received more food: “You give them something to eat.” Jesus kept the rations coming and the disciples continued the distribution. Third, purpose does not become overwhelmed or flustered by the need. Jesus insisted that those to whom he had imparted God’s power could take ownership of the situation. There is no long discourse recorded in the gospel, only a simple, “You do it!”

Matt. 25:34-45

Then the king will say to those at his right hand. ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you

welcome me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not take care of you?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’

This passage is part of Jesus’ fifth discourse, located in Matt. 24-25.

Jason Hood argues that its positioning signals that this last discourse ought to be interpreted in relation to the first, that of Matthew 5.²¹ In both discourses, Jesus connected deception and hypocrisy with his opponents, the Pharisees. He warned the listening crowds that “a choice to follow [Jesus’ opponents] is a choice for hypocrisy, violence, and injustice.”²² Hood elevates the idea of choice in this passage, those who choose to feed, clothe, and visit those in need and those who do not. Those who neglect to reach out to others are behaving intentionally, yet they feign ignorance about their inaction. Hood considers the audience, location, geography, literary connections, and the composition of this final discourse. He concludes that chapters 23-25 “uniquely infuse

²¹ Jason Hood, “Matthew 23-25: The Extent of Jesus’ Fifth Discourse,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 128 no. 3 (2009): 535.

²² Hood, “Matthew 23-25,” 536.

Jesus' distinctive teaching on discipleship, Christology, and judgment with the dramatic tension running through Matthew's plot."²³

The matter of meeting essential needs has a long Jewish history. Hunger must be viewed and understood within the context of Jewish Law. The Hebrew Bible includes stories of famine and want. Abraham and Sarai move from Canaan to Egypt because of famine. They travelled to a country that naturally possessed better natural crop irrigation (Gen. 12:10) and where Abraham thought they might recover. However, Abraham's deception that Sarai was his sister so angered the Pharaoh that he banished the family of hungry immigrants from Egypt. Abraham repeated the same deception in Genesis 20:1, when he met King Abimelech, king of the Philistines, in the region of Gerar. Stories of hungry widows are best illustrated via 1 Kings 17:7-15, in which the widow of Zarephath, because of her obedience to prepare a meal for the prophet, finds that her "jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah" (1 Kings 17:16 NIV).

The book of Ruth is central in the sequence of famine stories for it emphasizes even more glaringly the issues of trauma and otherness experienced by the hungry. Naomi and her husband Elimelech move to a detestable region in search of sustenance and settle there. Calamity strikes the family and Elimelech and his two sons die, leaving Naomi and the two daughters-in-law widowed. Naomi is an "other" in Moab and without the covering of her husband and sons, she is vulnerable. Naomi decides to return to Judah, and her daughter-in-law, Ruth, is determined to go with her. Ruth becomes the 'other' when she immigrates from Moab to Judah. The idea of being the "other" is

²³ Hood, "Matthew 23-25," 543.

significant in the book of Ruth. Ruth is hungry and caring for her mother-in-law. They have little, so Ruth gleans in the fields of Naomi's wealthy land-owning relative. Ruth illustrates the trauma associated with the extraordinary experience of hunger and food insufficiency combined with being a despised other. Boaz, the Redeemer, becomes her protector and husband. Ruth moves beyond her desperate existence. She was now eating without having to glean the fields each day picking leftovers, which was part of Jewish law to provide a safety net for the hungry: "When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and for the foreigner residing among you. I am the LORD your God" (Lev. 23:22)."

There are other incidents in scripture alluding to hunger and famine. Elijah called for a famine in 1 Kings 17:1: "As the LORD the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word." In the midst of a drought, the Lord instructs Jeremiah to forego praying for the people because they have wandered (Jer. 14:10) and declares "Although they fast, I do not hear their cry, and although they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I do not accept them; but by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence I consume them" (14:11).

Ralph Klein includes war, punishment for disobedience, economic powerlessness, and inequitable distribution of wealth as the major reasons for hunger stories in scripture. The process of "latifundialization," which added more patrimonial lands to the elite

classes, also contributed to hunger.²⁴ Those lands were worked by slaves and the profits were reaped by the owner.

Job's friends accused him of such unethical behaviors but Job defended his integrity: "If I have withheld anything that the poor desired... caused the eyes of the widow to fail...eaten my morsel alone... seen anyone perish for lack of clothing... or a poor person who was not warmed with the fleece of my sheep ... then let my shoulder blade fall from my shoulder, and let my arm be broken from its socket" (Job 31:16-20; 22-23). The law bound him to treat the poor with respect.

Jesus knew the law and his authority over it: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill" (Matt. 5:17). His deep understanding of the law countered the empty traditions of the Pharisees: "So, for the sake of your tradition, you make void the word of God. You hypocrites! Isaiah prophesied rightly about you when he said: 'This people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines' " (Matt. 15:6-9).

Returning to the Matthew 25 text, Jesus explains the basis on which God expects God's people to care for the hungry, naked, and imprisoned. According to Klein, the testimony of Joseph echoes the sentiment expressed by Jesus in Matthew 25: "I was sold into slavery and the Lord of all made me free... I was beset with hunger and the Lord himself nourished me. I was alone and God comforted me; I was sick, and the Lord

²⁴ Ralph W. Klein, "The God of the Bible Confronts the Politics of Hunger," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 17 (1990): 112.

visited me; I was in prison and my God showed favor to me.”²⁵ From these passages it is evident “that relief of hunger is a number one priority with God and hence it is a number one priority for those created in God’s image.”²⁶

In considering the hermeneutical slant of Matt. 25:36-40, it is important to note that historically Matthew wrote within Israel and Jesus taught among the Jewish community; Daniel Harrington reminds the reader, “Where they divide people into two groups, one should not immediately assume a division within the community of Jesus’ disciples or the church. The division is more likely within Israel.”²⁷ Jesus’ aim was to create a level playing field for all people. He appears to denounce latifundialization where a slave who did not produce lost more of his limited freedom (Matt. 25:14-30). He could identify with the ‘other,’ the stranger, and he understood and gravitated to the poor. The Law insisted, “Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, ‘Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land’ ” (Deut. 15:11). So, Jesus had compassion on the troubled (Matt. 9:36), the sick (Matt. 14:14), the hungry (Matt. 15:32), and the blind (Matt. 20:34).

I suggest that in his interactions with others, Jesus transformed the outcasts into those who belonged. Juxtaposing obedient and compassionate people against the insensitive, Jesus places compassion for others in a life and judgment struggle. The text points out the naivete of those who arrive at the judgement. Both groups question when they had ever seen the Lord in need (Matt. 25:37, 44). The first had cared for others to

²⁵ Klein, “The God of the Bible Confronts,” 113.

²⁶ Klein, “The God of the Bible Confronts,” 113.

²⁷ Daniel J. Harrington, “Polemical Parables in Matthew 24-25,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 44 no. 3-4 (1991): 291.

such an extent that their attentiveness to the poor was their testimony of faith. The second had been insensitive to the needs of others. The latter's strong rebuke focuses attention on the seriousness of God's intent that we care for one another. There are consequences for the obedient and the disobedient.

Jesus points to eight areas of service, starting with food and ending with prison visitation. He did not say that everyone needed to do everything; however, God expects everyone to do something. Thus, Jesus' pronouncement "just as you did it (or did not do it) to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me (Matt. 25:40)."

CHAPTER FIVE
OPTIONS FOR THE POOR¹

It was a warm day in summer, and I was a sophomore in college. My mother and I stood in line in the crowded office waiting to reach the counter. Lots of black and brown faces, mostly women, edged toward the front. It felt crowded and too close. I imagined that, like my mother, everyone was anxious. Would their claims be processed quickly? How much money could they count on receiving? When would the checks start? Mother would be happy for \$25 a week. We needed it. This was a ritual, particularly in the summer. Mother worked in a clothing factory – really a sweatshop. Hunched over a roaring sewing machine amidst hundreds of others, the sound was an assault to her eardrums day after day and year after year, which contributes to her hearing disability.

Mother was fast. She had to be. A piece worker, her check depended on how much she could produce. She sewed men’s suit coats for ten cents apiece or less. She kept her lot numbers in a small loose-leaf book and every week she handed in the tags from her lots arranged neatly and, as she called, it “in rotation.” She was fastidious about the weekly submissions because, she said, “sometimes they make mistakes in the office, and I must have proof. So, I have my papers and my book. I don’t want them to make mistakes. I need my money.” Sometimes the office made big mistakes! Her check would be short, and she would be at the mercy of the foreman as to when she would receive the

¹ “Options for the Poor” is a liberation theology that addresses the presuppositions, theological and historical of God’s love for the poor. Norbert F, Lohfink, S.J., in his book, *Options for the Poor*, explains the treatment of the poor in ancient times, which I discussed in detail in Chapter Three of this dissertation. Father Lohfink describes what could be termed the rights of the poor as they appear in scripture. His is an evocative treatment of subject matter very rarely tackled in this depth.

difference. Whenever that happened, it affected paying bills and buying food. She and Daddy pooled their earnings and they worked together to pay the bills; if there was a mix-up, they struggled to make ends meet.

We inched closer to the counter. We could hear the exasperation of the white clerks who interrogated each applicant. The clerks seemed “put out” and most impatient. We were behind a person who spoke Spanish. No matter how loud the clerk yelled, the person could not understand. What was the point of talking loudly? Didn’t she realize that it was not the decibel level but language that was the impasse? Since I spoke Spanish, I left my mother in line, went to the front counter, and functioned as the woman’s translator. The woman was grateful for the assistance. Had she been unable to complete the paperwork, she would have had to leave the office and return another day along with an interpreter. I helped a few other people before we had to leave. That episode took place many years ago, but the memory has remained. I am always affected when I think about the lack of concern and critical resources for the poor.

In early antiquity, separations by class were detailed to the point of sub-classifications that restricted people by birth and limited social interactions across class lines. There was not widespread agreement about the definition of class and how to assign it. Common thinking was that specifying class according to the type of work production was more legitimate. “Men are classed according to their relation to the means of production, first between those who do and those who do not own the means of production; second among the former, between those who work themselves and those who live off the labor of others.”² The class designations could cause “obvious difficulty;

² Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 49.

the slave and the free wage labourer would then be members of the same class and working together, side-by-side.”³ Classism was hard to regulate and navigate.

Jesus focused his attention on the poor; he understood that because people were invested in social distinctions invariably poverty would always be a factor in society. The tensions that flow out of the class definitions became more apparent once the concept of “holy poor” was adopted. The “category of the ‘holy poor’ raised an acute problem for the religious imagination. They were inevitably more prominent than were the ‘real poor’... The real poor lacked access as the holy poor did not.”⁴

Are those who work with the poor considered “holy poor”? Most people who come to CEI are chronically poor. Their financial situations are such that they visit the pantry to receive enough food to carry their families for about one week. The adults and the children who come are not nameless faces. We know them and intentionally, we look at them, call their names, and engage them. However, even in contemporary society, vestiges from antiquity abound. Designations like “the poor,” “the working poor,” “chronic poverty,” “the homeless and hungry” are words used to describe various levels and conditions of poverty. Often people describe the population of CEI in these ways, though CEI staff and volunteers avoid language that contributes to social distancing. CEI participants know the sting of scarcity and the agency is committed to a mission of hospitality, caring, and food (much like the Benedictines) and education (as Origen).⁵

³ Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 79.

⁴ Brown, *Treasure in Heaven*, xiv.

⁵ As described in Brown, *Treasure in Heaven*, 34.

The agency partners with congregations in the area to participate in its mission of providing necessities – food, clothing, and baby supplies for families. The agency receives financial, in-kind and volunteer support to implement its programs. The Covid-19 pandemic impacted the organization and highlighted that its survival is dependent on diversifying its funding streams. As the Executive Director, I promoted the organization by raising community awareness and generating more interest in feeding the poor and providing education for young children. When invited to discuss food insecurity, whether in churches, community groups, with elected officials, in the media, I shared information with a broader public and explained that birth station, race or ethnicity were not the sole predictors of future success.

Theorists suggest that hunger is less an issue of scarcity than of power, control, and distribution. Kingma points out: “It is not a matter of coincidence that the hungry and poor are the least able to exercise the social, political, and economic power to bring about change in their lives. The economically and politically powerful have created a tangled web of injustice which keeps things that way.”⁶

As a clergy leader and nonprofit executive, I believed it was important to create an atmosphere for dialogue that would move to an understanding that liturgy that is unrelated to life is not God’s plan.⁷ “The Church has one mission in which it – in God’s name – confronts and tries to reverse the politics of hunger by dealing God’s bread to all the hungry, to all the starving – those with bloated stomachs and those with bloated

⁶ Stuart J. Kingma, “Mere Survival or A More Abundant Life,” *The Ecumenical Review* 33 (1981), 258.

⁷ Klein, “The God of the Bible Confronts,” 115.

hearts.⁸ John Koessler points out the urgency “to identify injustice, in all its forms, as barriers to wholeness and health and to see this as an opportunity to truly become healing communities.”⁹ He asserts that Jesus has the power to strip us of all we think we have achieved.

I was convinced that CEI could lead transformation in the Church and in the community. In my view as a courageous leader, it was important to create an atmosphere for dialogue which would move the church to an understanding that liturgy must relate to life.¹⁰ The Church had to own that it has a mixed record when addressing concern for the poor because the “Church has often been identified with the powerful, the oppressors and exploiters of the poor.”¹¹

Chester Eastside received an invitation from Swarthmore College to collaborate on writing a national grant application. (This was the result of the conversation that I was invited to join while on the Hawaii excursion.) The goal of the collaborative was to develop a curriculum for addressing food scarcity targeted to area churches and community groups. The group was convinced that relating to each other would break down barriers. They also agreed that poor persons would be included in leading and developing strategies for the initiative. The group affirmed that it was critical that our work attest to the dignity and wisdom of all people.

⁸ Klein, “The God of the Bible Confronts,” 117.

⁹ Koessler, “Eat, Drink, and Be Hungry,” 35-36.

¹⁰ Klein, “The God of the Bible Confronts,” 115.

¹¹ Koessler. “Eat, Drink, and Be Hungry,” 35-36.

This was an audacious undertaking. The Executive Director was to function as the intermediary between each sector in moving from merely reading the Matthew 25 text to actualizing it. Klein put it succinctly: “Real ‘fasting’ means to set prisoners free, to feed the hungry, and to change one’s total lifestyle by losing the bonds of wickedness.”¹²

The CEI Board endorsed the concept. Since I was the co-facilitator of the proposed project, I assisted with curriculum design and recruitment of local pastors. The team worked on the grant for several months when Swarthmore College withdrew from the discussions. The CEI Board did not agree to moving forward with the project. Had the proposal been funded, CEI would have expected significant funding for five years. I faced still another challenge.

This unrealized project began a process of erosion in the agency’s fabric, for it uncovered a tension lurking within CEI. What was its source? The scenario triggered internal tensions that forced me to ruminate about my life and my work at CEI. As the Executive Director, I brought enthusiasm, experience, and innovation. In my first year I initiated innovative programs, strengthened existing ones, and created a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis. I confidently shared my observations, and I trusted that the Board, staff, volunteers, and I would tackle our problems together.¹³ My first analysis was delivered to the Board in January 2017; I was hopeful we could move forward.¹⁴ While I brought strong skill sets and passion, I also brought the little girl from “The Bottom” spoken of in Chapter One.

¹² Klein, “The God of the Bible Confronts,” 115.

¹³ The SWOT process was very enlightening. I suspected that the organization had major survival concerns, but I was unaware of the full extent. I learned very quickly.

¹⁴ SWOT Analysis, 2017. See appendix D.

I had not been there long when little Zuline was resurrected. My affluent board members talked proudly about their histories and how far back they could trace their lineages -- one as far back as the 14th century. They talked about their vacations and cottages and plans for retirement. None of these were relatable topics to me. I was affected by the stories about lineage; I was in awe of the stories, but I could only recall my mother's stories about my great-grandmother being born into slavery. Though the stories about ancestry were not intended to make me feel uncomfortable, they did. I never shared my perspective or discomforts about the exchanges because I did not want others to be uncomfortable. Their feelings mattered more than mine.

I had joined the organization at a lower salary than I had received in decades. I knew it was less than should have been the case for the role. I wanted the work, I believed in the CEI mission, and I accepted the position and believed we could grow. It offended me when board members pointed out that "I was getting the big bucks" to solve the agency's problems even though I did not have adequate resources.

Agency reorganization was going to be key to the agency's success. I was careful about restructuring because of the potential risks. For example, the organizational impact would be immediate; I would have no institutional or community memory available to me. I was unfamiliar with the community and wanted to avoid the probability of negative messaging about CEI, one of the city's venerable organizations. Zuline, the capable, competent, articulate leader, camouflaged the little girl Zuline, who felt vulnerable, hypervigilant, and less than others. When people hurled psychic insults about hair, my age, where I was from, I stood up most of the time and dealt with the offending white person. How dare they say those things to me! If I even *thought* of such things about

them what would my fate be? Each time I addressed the psychic intrusions in person and privately, like Nicodemus (John 3: 1-19). I received excuses and few apologies: I wondered what the corrective action could be. Psychological insults mounted over the years. I said nothing.

When you are poor, that is, Black and poor, you absorb a lot. The darker your skin the more people act as if they are entitled to say whatever comes to their minds. Even Black people participate in such misbehavior. Finley points out that in antiquity slaves who gained a peculium could own other slaves.¹⁵

Though I felt mounting internal tension, I lived with a scarcity mindset. I needed to be employed, and I was committed to CEI's mission. I was like a freedman. I knew that I was born a slave, i.e., Black, and poor; I had to earn money. I knew I was not a member of the leisure class. I had to produce by developing and sustaining more partnerships. I also needed to raise money. After five years, I finally realized that managing all the tasks, mostly alone, had become insurmountable. My creative vision was matched by constant struggles and crises that continually erupted. Monthly reports summarized the good developments that were taking place without inordinate mention of the crises. I was in control; I could manage everything including the Board's blurred boundaries.

Time at home was an extension of my day in the office which frequently ran into the next day. I preached on weekends, attended events on Saturdays, worked on holidays, didn't go on vacation trips, and rarely had eight hours of sleep. Mullainathan and Shafir describe what I was doing: "*Focus* is a positive: scarcity focuses us on what seems at that

¹⁵ Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 64.

moment, to matter most. *Tunneling* is not: scarcity leads us to tunnel and neglect other, possibly more important, things. Tunneling changes the way you think.”¹⁶

I was so preoccupied with saving CEI that family time, projects, social connections, even church involvement, suffered. I felt tense and my life was out of balance. Heifetz suggests in analyzing an organizational challenge and its outcome, “the lead consultants cannot see their own contribution to it.”¹⁷ I argue that blind spots are significant in organizational conflict, which may cause tension between leaders. Adaptive leadership occurs at the intersection between what is “known to self and known to others.”¹⁸

The staff may not have internalized tunneling behavior to the same extent as I. However, we were from similar circumstances and mindsets. They took their responsibilities seriously, worked for low wages, and without benefits. My assessment was that they worked at CEI because of their loyalty. They accepted the agency circumstances without complaints. Sometimes they told me that in the past they survived the possibility of closure. As I pondered restructuring an already skeleton staff, my tension mounted. I would be adding to their economic distress.

¹⁶ Mullainathan and Shafir, *Scarcity*, 29.

¹⁷ Heifetz, et al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, ebook. location 1124.

¹⁸ The concept of “known to self and known to others” is borrowed from the work of psychologists Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham. Developed in 1955, the Johari Window is a communication theory that gauges relationships between team members and their levels of trust. The theory challenges the individual to aim for transparency in their self revelations and in their communications. See examples of the Johari Window at <https://www.communicationtheory.org/the-johari-window-model/>. I submit that lack of transparency and attachment to CEI’s leadership challenges were barriers to authentic adaptive leadership.

Later than I should have, I noticed growing distance from the Board. In a meeting a board member disrespected me. In an emotional exchange, I finally said something in the presence of the board members. That was the beginning of physical distress. I was afraid of ageism, so I did not reveal my struggles; however, the result was two brief hospitalizations. Still, I kept going; regardless of my status -- whether freedman, helot, subaltern, or Executive Director, I had to keep up production. My doctor feared that I was close to having a stroke. I was a clergy leader about to have a physical collapse.

The tensions between my social, cultural, and religious contexts conflicted with my organization's leaders. I created a diagram of the dynamics.¹⁹ I was a Freedman working alongside the Entitled. There was no way to discuss the juxtaposition of culture, class, race, ethnicity, and sexism that I had brought up on several occasions. When the Board configuration changed, relationships grew more tense. Corporate board members multiplied as well as the authority of their voices. They seemed entitled to express their opinions vociferously in meetings and to take on some matters of day-to-day management. This was a culture clash as well since I was the only person who had spent their entire career as a leader in the nonprofit human service sector. In their eyes, I had no credibility. Bolsinger speaks to this issue in his discussion of navigating sectors. He suggests that marketplace leaders (corporate) "need a translator or guide to help them navigate the unfamiliar territory with its different traditions customs and language."²⁰ The

¹⁹ See appendix A.

²⁰ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Wilderness*, 64.

corporate person who joins a nonprofit organization may “come across as ‘too corporate’ or ‘too harsh.’”²¹

Heifetz, et al., set out key domains for leaders.²² Adaptive challenges are intrinsic to successful leadership and handling them was my strength. An experienced organizational leader, I was confident that CEI could adapt. Heifetz, et al., argue that technical skills need companion adaptive skills.²³ Technical skills focus on doing things. Adaptation is relational. Common in most of my roles, including CEI, I followed influential leaders with loyal followings. A first step was to develop new relationships and build trust. A new leader represented change or, more significantly, loss. As I conducted my organizational assessment, I understood that identity was important to the staff and the Board. Each had feelings of loss when the former Executive Director retired. The loss was even deeper than I conceived. “People [held] on to what they [had] and [resisted]the change.”²⁴ I soon discovered that:

... adaptive change is mostly not about change at all. The question is not only, ‘Of all we care about, what must be given up to survive and thrive going forward?’ but also, ‘Of all that we care about, what elements are essential and must be preserved into the future, or we will lose precious values, core competencies, and lose who we are?’ As in nature, a successful adaptation enables an organization or community to take the best from its traditions, identity, and history into the future.²⁵

²¹ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Wilderness*, 64.

²² Heifetz, et al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*. ebook. location 466.

²³ Heifetz, et al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*. ebook. location 509.

²⁴ Heifetz, et al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*. ebook. location 516.

²⁵ Heifetz, et al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*. ebook. location 523.

Not only is adaptability critical to effective leadership, but so are credibility, technical, and relational skills. According to Bolsinger, the presence of these four elements are keys to transformational leadership.²⁶ Leadership entails adapting to a changing nonprofit landscape. The Presbytery had new stated goals about its outreach:

In 1943 city [Philadelphia] churches accounted for two thirds of the presbytery. By 1993, they were less than one quarter. The presbytery's priorities shifted to reflect the interests of a wealthier, family-oriented, suburban population. The Presbytery of Philadelphia began to reinvent itself as a decentralized mission support movement, concentrating its energies on its congregations' local initiatives, on innovative ministries, on repurposing old buildings, and on new worshiping communities.²⁷

The focus on social ministry had shifted. CEI would not return to its previous status within the Presbytery. CEI owed money to the denomination, which requested a timely plan for repayment. We were in a difficult financial situation. Both the board and I needed to adapt to my first major challenge. I was new and unfamiliar with the organizational and denominational dynamics. Uncertain about how we could pay the debt, we began an exhausting series of negotiations to create a plan. After months of negotiations, we invited members of the denomination to visit CEI. They accepted. On the day of the visit, the leaders witnessed bustling activity, met program participants, and engaged staff and volunteers about our work. The impact was more than we expected; shortly after, the Presbytery forgave the debt. Heifetz and his colleagues stress working together on adaptive leadership plans.²⁸

²⁶ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Wilderness*, 42-43.

²⁷ Presbytery of Philadelphia, www.presbyphl.org/history.

²⁸ Heifetz, et al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*. ebook. location 1798.

Leading people requires relational as well as technical competencies. My goal was to accept the board, staff and volunteers where they were with “the tangible embrace of Christ.” Bolsinger believes that people need to “experience the love of God as they are led into the mission of God.”²⁹ Unlike any other position I had ever held, the intersections at CEI included my religious affiliation, ordination status, and Christian mission. At times, the board commented that CEI needed a businessperson rather than a pastor. I did not view the two as mutually exclusive and usually did not respond to the comments. Bolsinger speaks about the importance of both.³⁰

The situations that came to CEI included requests for prayer in addition to the tangible items. Families faced serious illnesses, deaths, evictions, unemployment, and hunger. Prayer and counsel were ordinary aspects of my role as I kept addressing the unrelenting infrastructure problems.

A Christian views the marketplace as a mission field in need of a Christian example, witness and stewardship to reveal God’s working in the world, Christians in disruptive marketplace sectors need as much discernment and discipleship as a commitment to innovation.³¹

Bolsinger cautions against the temptation “to return to a sacred-secular split that separated the moral and spiritual of Sunday Morning from the rough and tumble of Monday to Friday”³² calling it not merely hypocritical practice but heretical thinking. This false delineation is counter to how Jesus taught and acted in the world.

²⁹ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Wilderness*, 55-56.

³⁰ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Wilderness*, 43-44.

³¹ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Wilderness*, 19.

³² Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Wilderness*, 19.

In Chapter Three, the Matthew passage has Jesus calling his disciples together and charging them to feed the crowd. Jesus prayed, broke the bread and fishes, and returned them to the disciples to distribute to the crowd. He taught the disciples, talked with them, encouraged them, and prepared them for the future. Jesus' example in Matthew illustrated the significance of having partners when taking on issues, whether large or small:

Whether you are taking on a small initiative or a large one, do not go it alone. Find the partners who will share the dangers and the exposure. Together, you'll stand a far better chance of avoiding attacks from opponents and keeping your initiative alive.³³

The was no infrastructure at CEI. I felt like the disciples who asked Jesus where they would get food and how to pay for it. I attempted to change the situation at CEI. Each time an idea did not work, my credibility suffered. We needed more resources and specific skill sets. I struggled against “resisting the temptation to take the conflictual elements of the adaptive work off other people’s shoulders and putting it on my own. The pressure to relieve them of that work comes from both them and from you.”³⁴ The negative voices became louder. I sensed that there were conversations going on about me but not with me. When I received a directive to create a restructuring plan (which was really a corrective action plan covering the issues that I brought to board leaders many times) I believed that my position and career were at stake. That was scarcity thinking rearing itself again. I tried repeatedly to “fix” the structures to no avail. Unlike the band in *Casablanca* which out sang the German soldiers (referenced in Bolsinger), I had no

³³ Heifetz, et al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*. ebook. location 834.

³⁴ Heifetz, et al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*. ebook. location 2089.

choir to drown out the negative voices. Little Zuline struggled to stay the course though she felt increasingly disrespected. Both Heifetz, et al., and Bolsinger emphasize the importance of effective leadership. Leadership is a way of being in an organization. The leader “[mobilizes] people to tackle tough challenges and thrive. Leadership is expressed in actions, relationships, and responsibility. The leader is not blaming anyone. Leadership is learned in doing and reflecting on the doing. Leaders can persist without distancing or taking resistance personally.”³⁵ It was difficult to remain positive and focused when I was having little success. I took it personally.

CARRYING WATER

My parents shaped me, and society made sure I would grow up affected by the insults that would come to deregulate me. I am not the only one. Wilderson dealt with the terror of being male and black as a little boy in Minneapolis when a white woman asked him how he liked being Negro.³⁶ Esau McCaulley stands on his “unapologetically Black and orthodox reading of the Bible [which] can speak a relevant word to Black Christians today.”³⁷ I am more aligned with McCaulley, while hiding pain like Wilderson. How was I able to juggle crises, delays, intimidation, humiliation, depression, exhaustion, and betrayal as the undercurrent raged? The scarcity mindset had eclipsed my thinking. Emotionally impoverished, the condition was worsening. After the fact of my separation from the organization, I created a visual. The vocals against my continued leadership had grown over time. I was so focused on moving the organization forward in my own

³⁵ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Wilderness*, 22.

³⁶ Wilderson, *Afropessimism*, 24.

³⁷ Esau McCaulley, *Reading While Black* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2020), 6.

strength. At least sixty percent of the board were sorely displeased. How could that be? How did I miss that? How had I become so insulated?

I was carrying water. Heifetz, et al., offer this. Some leaders are tuned to carry other people's water. My history could be the example he uses. As the successful daughter, I have always wanted to compensate for what my parents did not have. While "I made them proud of me, and far more comfortable, [how] that pride compensates for their own wounds is beyond [my control]."³⁸ I carried buckets of water at CEI.

When you carry *too* much of someone else's water or carry the water of too many other people, you will only end of feeling overwhelmed...Feel overwhelmed long enough, and you lose your capacity to be productive, whether it is leading adaptive change or managing even the simplest responsibilities in your work, family, or community life. Understanding what is wearing you down is the first step toward relieving yourself of the burden and getting others to carry their own water.³⁹

I was exhausted in every way. The buckets became heavier and heavier. I had forgotten several adaptive leadership principles clearly outlined in the Bible and echoed by Bolsinger and Heifetz. Jesus did not model taking on the spread of the Gospel singlehandedly. Rather, he identified twelve disciples who became his team and his supporters. Jesus provided training and sent the disciples in teams to execute what they had learned. When they encountered a problem, they discussed it and adapted their leadership style.

At CEI I had addressed problems from the beginning of my tenure. From the beginning, I carried water. When money was tight, I carried more water. As we sought out new sources of income, the carrying grew so much more difficult. I experienced short

³⁸ Heifetz, et al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*. ebook. location 3419.

³⁹ Heifetz, et al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*. ebook. location 3425.

periods when I felt a sense of accomplishment. Most often, I kept struggling alone. Each passage that we exegeted raised intersectionality, adaptability, socioeconomics as key organizational strategies. Like Peter and the disciples, I should have gathered individuals who could understand and embrace the organizational mission and work directly with me, though it may have meant a major organizational restructuring and massive layoffs. Most important, I needed to recognize what I brought to the organization and realize that I was an invaluable asset. As a courageous leader I needed to establish priorities and be unafraid to use my voice to express my professional assessments, offer clear arguments, and create recommendations and the consequences of inertia. The courageous leader should have a plan evaluating the work of the Board and the Executive Director.

Adaptive leadership is not one dimensional but rather multidimensional. I should have owned that I was an ex-officio Board member and not a subaltern. Gauging loyalty to me and my leadership would have been wise. Feedback is an important tool for adapting the leadership style. Lastly, I should have stepped up long ago to share my frustration with the Board. I needed to trust that my integrity and competence would make a difference.

This autoethnographic approach to considering scarcity and poverty forced me to consider my strengths and weaknesses as a leader. There were things that I did well which led to benefits for the organization, and the evidentiary data are clear to those who are familiar with the struggles and successes of CEI. However, as a courageous leader there were things that I missed. There were times when I should have been more direct with the Board. It was after years of being available for any request (which more often felt like demands), I began to establish boundaries. Role blurring contributed to the communication difficulties. When I acted like a colleague rather than an employee, that

may have seemed inappropriate. When it was impossible to move goals forward, there was blaming. I believed delays were viewed as my fault, and I internalized comments about me. However, the Board leaders were not inclined to review their behaviors. Heifetz, et al., end their book reminding the leader to be conscious of how they deploy themselves. The authors view self-care as of utmost importance because it has long-term benefits to the leader and the organization. Reading organizational dynamics is another cue for the courageous leader.

Scarcity is a mindset that permeates behavior and can mitigate against personal and professional success. The poor may have fewer resources, but a scarcity mindset does not necessarily follow. God calls Christians to be concerned about others, though sometimes they succumb to the scarcity mindset. God expects Christians to act rather than talk about mission and everyone needs a turn to carry water. God does not want God's people to be overwhelmed, but rather to be deliberate and break large problems into manageable portions. Is God still calling for people who desire to be fully Christian in a world that opposes the gospel? Why would Jesus' parables focus so much on the hungry and the poor? Jesus' message was one of transformational caring. He refused to adhere to the unholy social stratifications of his day. He was the primary example of a transformational leader for he assembled trusted people around himself. He developed deep relationships which engendered credibility. He taught important concepts until they had meaning for the team. He modeled appropriate behavior and actualized his authority. He relied on the spiritual.

The challenges that I encountered during my tenure in a cross-cultural context often caused me to question my leadership skills. In the end, leaving the organization that

I had once felt called to serve was the most freeing experience in my professional life. I moved away from little Zuline and discovered my own person. I can state unequivocally that I am a leader:

[Any] person who is willing to take personal responsibility, convene a group to work on a tough problem and persist in the face of resistance is a leader ... leadership is learned in the doing and by reflecting on the doing... Without essential leadership behaviors, most organizations are not growing, not transforming and not facing their toughest challenges or thriving.⁴⁰

Self-affirmation is as essential to the psyche as waiting to hear it from others. It is a courageous leader who is comfortable with intersectionality, adaptive capacity and the urgency of theological discourse about these issues. The connections between these topics are fascinating and compel further study. This topic is important for the individual leader and the church which desires to become deeply invested in contemporary social issues.

⁴⁰ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Wilderness*, 22.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aberbach, David. *Literature and Poverty: From the Hebrew Bible to the Second World War*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2019.
- Bednarowski, Marry Farrell. "Outside the Mainstream: Women's Religion and Women Religious Leaders in Nineteenth-Century America." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 48:2 (June 1980): 207-231.
- Bolsinger, Tod. *Canoeing the Mountains*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015.
- Brown, Peter. *Treasure in Heaven: The Holy Poor in Early Christianity*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2016.
- Collins, Patricia Hill, and Sirma Bilge. *Intersectionality*. Medford, OR: Polity Press, 2020.
- DeConick, April D. *Holy Misogyny: Why Sex and Gender in the Early Church Still Matters*. London: Bloomsbury Press, 2013.
- Finley, M. I. *The Ancient Economy*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985.
- Goodspeed, Scott W. *Community Stewardship: Applying the Five Principles of Contemporary Governance*. Chicago, IL: American Hospital Pub., 1998.
- Harrington, Daniel J. "Polemical Parables in Matthew 24-25." *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* no. 3-4 (1991): 287-298.
- Heifetz, Ronald, Alexander Glashow, and Marty Linksy. *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*. Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009.
- Hood, Jason. "Matthew 23-25: The Extent of Jesus' Fifth Discourse." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128 no. 3 (2009): 527-543.
- Horsley, Richard A. *Covenant Economics: A Biblical Vision of Justice for All*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.
- Jeremias, Joachim. *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: An Investigation into Economic and Social Conditions during the New Testament Period*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2019.
- Kendi, Ibram X. *How to Be an Antiracist*. New York, NY: One World, 2019.
- Kim, Grace Ji-Sun, and Susan M. Shaw. *Intersectional Theology: An Introductory Guide*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2018.

- Kingma, Stuart J. "Mere Survival or A More Abundant Life." *The Ecumenical Review* 33 (1981): 257-271.
- Klein, Ralph W. 1989. "The God of the Bible Confronts the Politics of Hunger." *Currents in Theology and Mission* 17 (1990): 110-117.
- Koessler, John. 2007. "Eat, Drink and Be Hungry." *Christianity Today* 35-36.
- Lohfink, Norbert. *Option for the Poor: The Basic Principle of Liberation Theology in the Light of the Bible; the Bailey Lectures March 31 - April 2, 1986*. Berkeley, CA: Bibal Press, 1995.
- McCaulley, Esau. *Reading While Black*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2020.
- Meeks, Wayne A. *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul, Second Edition*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003.
- Mele, Christopher. *Race and the Politics of Deception*. New York: New York University Press, 2107.
- Moffic, Evan. *Reading The Old Testament through Jewish Eyes*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2021.
- Mullainathan, Sendhil, and Eldar Shafir. *Scarcity: Why Having Too Little Means so Much*. New York, NY: Times Books, Henry Holt and Co., 2013.
- Neal, Jerusha Matsen. *The Overshadowed Preacher: Mary, The Spirit, And The Labor Of Proclamation*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021.
- O'Connor, Kathleen M. 2020. "Let All the Peoples Praise You: Biblical Studies and a Hermeneutis of Hunger." *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*: 2-14.
- Spencer-Miller, Althea. "Matthew for Societies in Transition." Class Lecture. March 2, 2020.
- Poulos, Christopher. *Essentials of Autoethnography*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2021.
- Scazzero, Peter. *The Emotionally Healthy Leader*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015.
- Theissen, Gerd. *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1989.
- Thurman, Howard. *Jesus and the Disinherited*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996.
- Tsoffar, Ruth. 2007. "The Trauma of Otherness and Hunger: Ruth and Lot's Daughters." *Women in Judaism: A Multidisciplinary Journal* 5 no.1: 1-13.

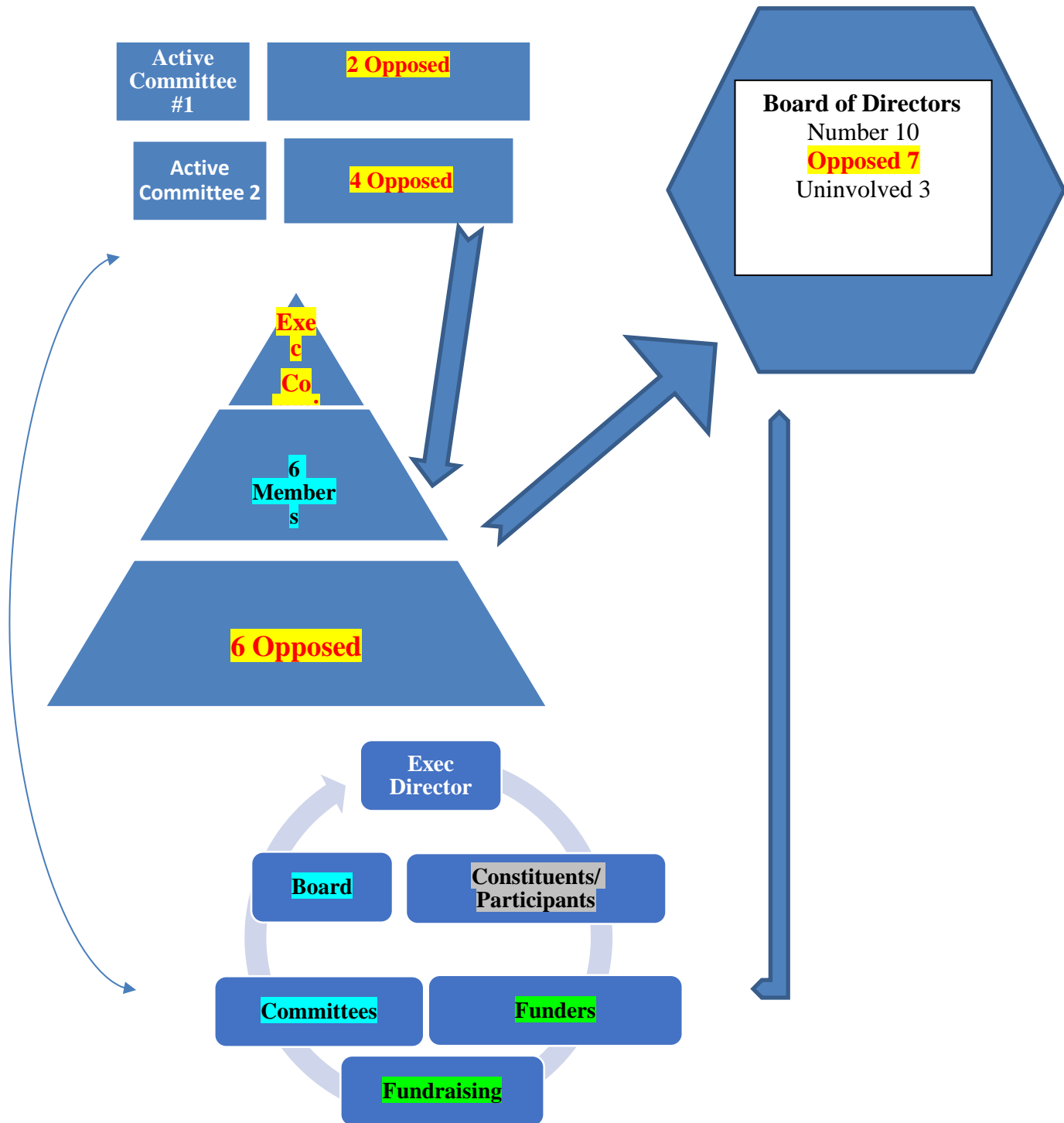
Virkler, Henry A., and Karelynn Gerber Ayayo *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009.

Walton, Claire, and Zuline Gray Wilkinson. 2020. *Chester Eastside, Inc. - A Summary of Activities*. Internal, Chester: Chester Eastside, Inc.

Weaver, Peter. "Transformational Leadership." Class Lecture. January 30, 2020.

Wilderson, III, Frank B. *Afropessimism*. New York: Liveright Publishing, 2020.

Appendix A
 Communication Challenges

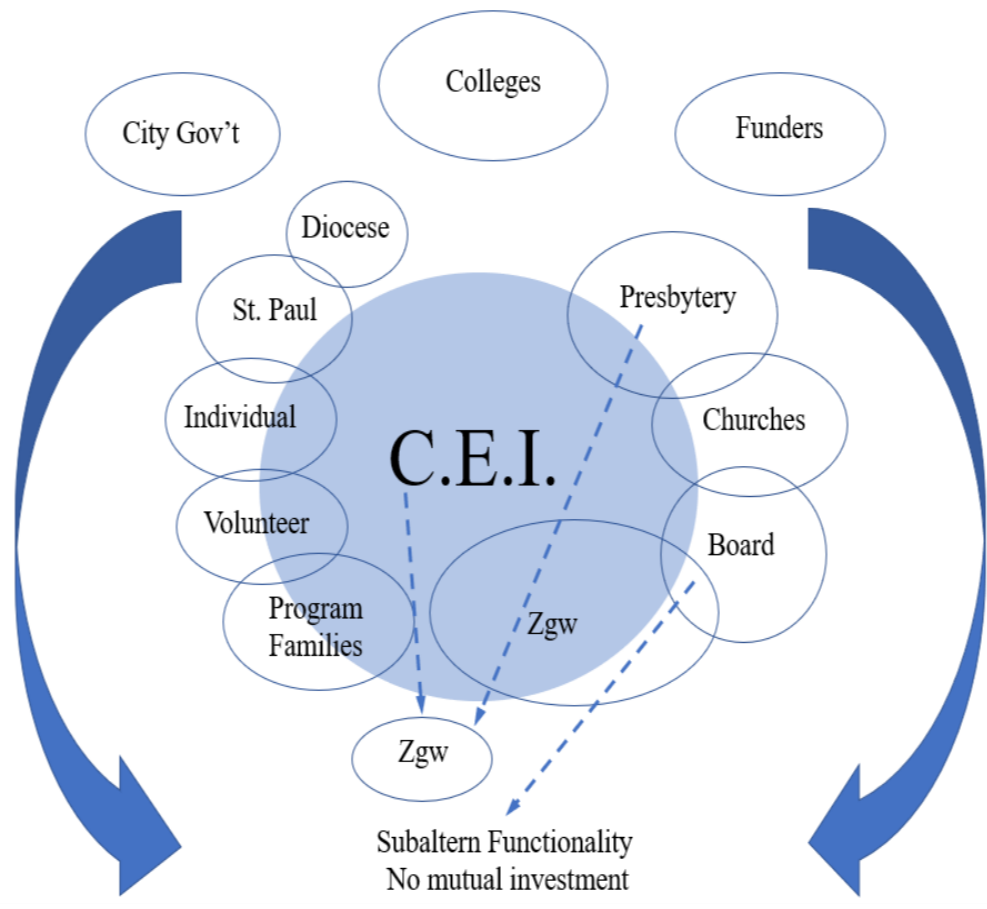


Organizational communication patterns unknown to Executive Director and up to one third of Board Members. Confidence in the Executive Director waned, though that was not expressed to the

Executive or the Board. Their concerns were technical versus adaptive and relational while the Executive Director continued to adapt to challenges and to manage fundraising.

Appendix B

CEI Stakeholders Sustainability



Appendix C

Thriving Congregations - ACTIVITY TIMELINE

Starting Phase

Start	Activities	Notes	COVID19 Changes?
Oct 2020	Grant set up, funds created, notify participants, planning by Mark and Zuline; bring on new staff		
Feb 2021	Get-to-Know-You meetings among the project team leaders and core leadership group: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kick-off meeting to introduce everyone to each other Follow up meeting to set goals and agree on process and timeline 		Zoom possibly required if physical distancing is still required

Phase 1: Exploring and Understanding Our Context

- Mostly meetings of the core planning group and selected congregations from Chester and DelCo suburbs

Start	Activities	Notes	COVID19 changes?
July 2021	First meeting of understanding our context: social, economic, health	In Chester; led by Mark and Zuline	Zoom possibly required if physical distancing is still required
Sept 2021	Second meeting of understanding our context: social, economic, health	In DelCo suburbs; special speaker or consultant?	Zoom possibly required if physical distancing is still required
Nov 2021	Third meeting of understanding our context: social, economic, health	TBD; special speaker or consultant?	Zoom possibly required if physical distancing is still required

Phase 2: Clarifying Values and Mission

- Extend conversations to individual congregations
 - Could include individual consultations with congregations

Start	Activities	Notes	COVID 19 Changes?
Jan 2022	First meeting of clarifying values and mission	In Chester; led by Mark and Zuline	Zoom possibly required if physical distancing is still required
Mar 2023	Second meeting of clarifying values and mission	In DelCo suburbs; special speaker or consultant?	Zoom possibly required if physical distancing is still required
June 2024	Third meeting of clarifying values and mission	TBD; special speaker or consultant?	Zoom possibly required if physical distancing is still required

Phase 3: Adapting Ministries

- Hands-on work with congregations
 - Could include individual consultations with congregations

Appendix D

CEI SWOT Analysis

CEI SWOT ANALYSIS

Rev. Zuline Gray Wilkinson, Executive Director



FISCAL



S Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Dedicated volunteer accountant• Tremendous support from neighboring churches•In-kind donations•Tremendous Presbytery financial support	W Weaknesses <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Inadequate financial support•Lack of contracts•Insufficient funds to cover program costs•Lack of proper fiscal procedures•Inadequate use of technology•Lack of adequate technology•Loss of key staff
O Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Strategic alliances, partnerships•Creation of fiscal policies and procedures•Replace dedicated volunteer accountant•Organizational restructuring	T Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Dedicated volunteer accountant will leave•Programs discontinuation•Organizational restructuring

PROGRAMS



S	Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Programs known in community Afterschool, Camp, Food •Longstanding programs •Committed staff •Outstanding volunteers •Program operate at near capacity •Good reputation 	W	Weaknesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •STAFFING is inadequate •Funding does not cover costs •Compliance with regulations (Food) •Food for Afterschool and Camp (\$) •Outcome measures •Lack of written protocols, curricula •Staff continuing education •Understanding of best practices •Recruitment of participants •Volunteer orientation, training
O	Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Strategic alliances, partnerships •Strong university partners •Establish collaboration with schools •Identify and incorporate best practices •Marketing •Innovative programming peripheral programs 	T	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deficit spending •Inaccurate reporting •Loss of partners •Strong competition •Competitors new services and innovation •Inadequate staffing •Loss of financial support

Marketing & Advocacy



S	Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Web presence •Constant Contact •Name recognition in community 	W	Weaknesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •No media visibility •Web presence is weak •No marketing analysis •Little publicity regarding outcomes •Limited marketing materials •No Marketing Plan •No program assessment data •Little knowledge of competition
O	Opportunities <p>Create Marketing Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Develop alliances with media •Tell the CEI story •Emphasize achievements •Publicize grant/contract awards 	T	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Erosion of public presence •Inability to attract funding from a broader base •Competitors develop innovative new services •Overtaken by competitors

BOARD OF DIRECTORS



<p>S Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a Board • Active, engaged • Give money, time, resources • Longevity with CEI • Mission-Driven • Knowledgeable about the community • Involved/ Live in the Community • Diverse • Various skill sets 	<p>W Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaged/ Role blurring • Activity levels inconsistent • Inconsistent fundraising • Not as focused on outcomes and messaging • Becoming aware of core support services and the impact on the budget
<p>O Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board can grow • Board can be intentional about diversity • Board can develop appropriate role • Board can assume more ownership of fund development in partnership with ED • Board can develop a clearer vision for CEI 	<p>T Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of cutting edge programs • Competition • Inadequate marketing • Inadequate fundraising • Organizational structure • Withdrawal of Presbytery support

FUND DEVELOPMENT



<p>S Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support of area churches • Board support • Limited individual contributions • Limited grant funding 	<p>W Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very limited financial support • No contracts • Deficit financing • No signature events • No Development Plan
<p>O Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop alliances partnerships • Create Development Plan • Identify potential funding sources 	<p>T Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inability to attract funding from a broader base • Competitors develop innovative new services • Overtaken by competitors • Agency decline/demise

HUMAN RESOURCES



<p>S Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loyal Staff • Mission-Driven Staff • Committed Volunteers 	<p>W Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate Staffing • Low wages • Lack of wage/benefit parity • Low technology use
<p>O Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Realignment of limited budget • Align skills with roles • Increased volunteer support 	<p>T Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change in Presbytery support • Inability to expand programs • Discontent over parity • Agency lifeblood

WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

- **THE SAME THING ?**
- **REVIEW TRENDS?**
- **EVIDENCED BASED PRACTICE?**
- **EMPLOY QUALITY IMPROVEMENT TECHNIQUES?**
- **PARTNER STRATEGICALLY?**



- **T A K E ACTION**
- **RAISE AWARENESS & RAISE MONEY!!!!**