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ABSTRACT

BREAKING GENERATIONAL POVERTY

THROUGH COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS

by

Rodney L. Graves

The Beaumont, Texas area has a large number of individuals and families unable or uninspired to break the cycle of generational poverty. This serious epidemic does not reflect God's Creation design or covenants with His people. Using Jesus' words, "the poor will always be with you," to justify poverty's existence lacks congruency with the overall biblical witness. Dr. Ruby Payne popularized the culture of poverty hypothesis based on behaviors, worldviews, and language. Many academics contend that Dr. Payne's widely acclaimed self-published work lacks peer review and promotes a deficit perspective of the poor which fosters stereotypes and reflects classism.

The purpose of this qualitative Pre-Intervention study was to investigate what ministries McCabe Roberts Avenue (MCRA) UMC might develop and how the church might collaborate with local ministry partners to help break the cycle of generational poverty in the Beaumont, Texas area. Given the research questions that guide this study, the researcher believed that the best way to gather data for this project was through a Focus Group and Semi-Structured Interviews with persons who have experiential knowledge about and phenomenal success with helping people transition from poverty to self-sufficiency. Fourteen participants were involved: four MCRA leaders comprised the Focus Group, four Semi-Structured Interviews comprised of two Pastors and two ministry leaders from St. John's UMC Downtown Houston and Harvest for Lost Souls in

MCRA's mission field, and six Semi-Structured Interviews with persons from two not-for-profits.

The research project disclosed eight major findings. The first finding related to the significance of Spiritual Formation and Discipleship to strengthen both the church and the poor. The second finding related to Addressing Destructive Behavior (effects of systemic institutional barriers) through Authentic Relationships which help persons move beyond a limited self-concept. The third finding related to the challenges of dealing with Systemic Institutional Barriers (causes) that lead to Destructive Behavior (effects). The fourth finding relates to Targeting Transforming Generations by indirectly or directly empowering youth. The fifth finding related to the imperative of leadership to Create and Cast a Compelling Vision that stimulates congregants to invest human and financial resources. The sixth finding related to Addressing Systemic Institutional Barriers (classism and its subcategories of racism, sexism, or ageism) through Advocacy: representing the poor at the seats of power and assisting the poor in navigating through the system. The seventh finding related to developing Collaborative Efforts that are Missional and Strategic-with entities that are addressing generational poverty and with mental health professionals. The eighth finding related to Creating Relationships with the Marginalized to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in need assessment and service provision.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled

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THROUGH COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS

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by

Rodney L. Graves

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF GRAPHS vii

LIST OF CHARTS viii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ix

CHAPTER 1 NATURE OF THE PROJECT 1

Overview of the Chapter 1

Personal Introduction 1

Statement of the Problem 5

Purpose of the Project 5

Research Questions 6

Research Question #1 6

Research Question #2 6

Research Question #3 6

Rationale for the Project 6

Definition of Key Terms 9

Delimitations 13

Review of Relevant Literature 14

Research Methodology 17

Type of Research 18

Participants 18

Instrumentation 20

Data Collection 20

Data Analysis 21
Generalizability 22
Project Overview 22
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PROJECT 24
Overview of the Chapter 24
Biblical and Theological 25
Theoretical and Historical Context 38
Missional and Strategic 57
Spiritual Disciplines 58
Prayer 58
Worship 63
Ministry Initiatives 67
Collaborative Efforts 70
Research Design Literature 75
Summary of Literature 78
CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THE PROJECT 81
Overview of the Chapter 81
Nature and Purpose of the Project 81
Research Questions 82
Research Question #1 82
Research Question #2 82
Research Question #3 83
Ministry Context(s) 83

Participants....84
Criteria for Selection....84
Description of Participants....85
Ethical Considerations....90
Instrumentation....91
Expert Review (optional)....91
Reliability & Validity of Project Design....91
Data Collection....93
Data Analysis....98
CHAPTER 4 EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT....100
Overview of the Chapter....100
Participants....100
Research Question #1: Description of Evidence....106
Research Question #2: Description of Evidence....114
Research Question #3: Description of Evidence....125
Summary of Major Findings....132
CHAPTER 5 LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT....134
Overview of the Chapter....134
Major Findings....135
Ministries: Spiritual Formation and Discipleship....135
Address Destructive Behavior (effects) through Authentic Relationships....136
Challenges: Systemic Institutional Barriers (causes) that lead to Destructive Behavior (effects)....138

Target Transforming Generations 143

Create and Cast a Compelling Vision 145

Address Systemic Institutional Barriers (causes) through Advocacy 147

Develop Collaborative Efforts that are Missional and Strategic with entities that are addressing generational poverty and with mental health professionals 150

Create Relationships with the Marginalized 153

Ministry Implications of the Findings 156

Limitations of the Study 160

Unexpected Observations 162

Recommendations 162

Postscript 164

APPENDIX

Consent Form Template 167

WORKS CITED 170

WORKS CONSULTED 180

LIST OF GRAPHS

Graph Page

4.1 Participants: Totals, Race, Gender, and Marital Status 105

4.2 Participants: Entity, Education, and Experience 105

LIST OF CHARTS

Chart Page

1.1 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs 12

4.1 Participants: Totals, Race, Gender, and Marital Status 104

4.2 Participants: Entity, Education, and Experience 104

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The faith-bearers who share Christ's love and through His Spirit spread light with humble holy boldness.

CHAPTER 1

NATURE OF THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter sets the stage to explore the causes and effects of generational poverty in order to develop life transforming ministry. First, this paper explores causes and effects and then explores the relationship, if any, with systemic institutional barriers and personal lifestyles. The systemic institutional barriers covered issues such as classism and its subcategories of racism, sexism, and ageism. Unproductive personal lifestyles were examined in light of the extent that detrimental behavior perpetuates generational poverty. Developing life transforming ministry to help break the cycle of generational poverty required in-depth research.

Personal Introduction

In 1995, a predominantly White United Methodist Church (UMC) congregation (Roberts Avenue) and predominantly Black UMC congregation (McCabe) merged becoming McCabe Roberts Avenue (MCRA) UMC. MCRA is now about 88% Black and 12% White in a neighborhood that is primarily Black with a significant Hispanic population. The surrounding formerly upper-middle class community located in Beaumont, Texas is now marginally middle class with a significant poor population. Economic and demographic transitions in both the church and community created dynamics which affected the church's approach to and understanding of its mission field.

In 2013, the burning question was ignited in an interesting conversation about the poor that I had with MCRA's lay leader. He is the most outstanding layperson I have ever met and is a leader of influence within the congregation and Conference. He is like the

old E.F. Hutton investment banking commercial's famous line "when E.F. Hutton speaks, people listen." I referenced Jesus' words in Matthew 26.11 "The poor will always be with you". I explained that I ascribe to the perspective that Jesus Christ was making social commentary on the adverse effect of systemic greed. This view is predicated on the belief that greed has distorted God's original plan for Creation because God intended that everyone would have at least enough. I also added that Dr. Douglas Meeks wrote:

> If the righteousness of God is present, there is always enough to go around. From the manna in the desert, to Jesus' feeding of the multitudes, the Lord's Supper, the biblical traditions depict the superabundance (*plērōma*) of God's Spirit as the starting point of God's household and its practice of hospitality. Thus should the doctrine of God follow the biblical claim of the fullness of God's being rather than the modern economic assumption of the formal emptiness of God's being, which can be filled or negated by human impulses to self-possession, autonomous individualism, and greed (12).

The lay leader said, "That may be so, Pastor; however, another dynamic is that poor people get trapped in unproductive behavioral cycles that become intergenerational." This profound observation broke my heart because I see so much poverty in our mission field.

The parsonage is located in this neighborhood. As a result, we see the continuing decline of people and property. After this conversation, I became more convinced than ever that our church needed to help break this cycle. My burning passion has been for the least, lost, and the last. Even as an undergraduate Accounting/Economics major, I envisioned a life helping people become empowered. Back then, I defined empowerment

as social justice and economic equality. When I was a part owner of a Certified Public Accounting (CPA) firm, I often provided opportunities for women and men who experienced rejection by major firms. While an active leader in Windsor Village UMC, I finally accepted my call to the ministry. During the late 1980s, the Senior Pastor often spoke about social justice in the educational system and taught us that the same God who saved our souls desired us to be productive in all areas of life. Even as a young boy, I worked with my dad in the Civil Rights movement. These influences led to my majoring in Urban Ministry at Wesley Theological Seminary. I eventually served as an Associate Pastor at both Windsor Village and St. John's Downtown Houston. With the Senior Pastors of St. John's, I saw a very vibrant ministry to the homeless influenced, in part, by Glide Memorial UMC in San Francisco, CA. I saw homeless people get medical/dental care, food, mental health counseling, and recovery support. Some furthered their education and some became apartment renters or homeowners.

Before we married, my wife was an active member of St. John's Downtown. She was very influential in the development of the ministry of transparency that has been foundational in St. John's Downtown. The Senior Pastors modeled their ministry of transparency on anonymous groups. In 2009, when my wife and I visited Beaumont (Texas) to see McCabe Roberts Avenue UMC, she could tell by the neighborhood that there were recovery houses in the community. She also spotted some "street-walkers," and her heart ached. Although she's been clean for 3 decades and serves as a Hospice chaplain, my wife feels compelled to help people immersed in self destructive behavioral patterns. She envisions having bible studies and mixers on the parsonage lawn with the sisters who are walking the streets. To be sure, we also envision connecting with young

families who need help accessing the abundant life that Jesus came to bring for all people.

After my wife and I observed these depraved conditions, we were inspired to create a separate IRS 501 (c)(3) corporation called Growing Community, Inc. (GCI). GCI has sought to strengthen the neighborhood through a community garden project. Through this effort, we teach children and families about basic economics, nutrition, and horticulture. We play a game with the children called Entrepreneurship bingo. In this game, the children match their board words (e.g. demographics, profit and loss, cost of goods sold, risk) with the definitions we read. However noble, these efforts are not enough to radically change the cycle of poverty.

In my last pastoral appointment, I influenced a builder to install a $5 million wastewater system in an inner urban community which previously relied on a septic tank as recently as 2008. With the community support that I provided, the builder received tax credits needed to construct an affordable first-class apartment complex for seniors and another for families which dramatically increased the residents' standard of living. I also worked with legislators to get an area declared as an Enterprise Zone which provides incentives for community economic development. I consider myself an "Inner-Urban missionary" divinely purposed to help inner city residents to access a better life. I commit to this purpose because it witnesses to Jesus Christ and hopefully expands God's Reign in McCabe Roberts Avenue (MCRA) UMC and other places, too.

The one thing that I most bemoan is that in spite of having so many churches in the neighborhood there is little evidence of life transformation taking place in the lives of the people. Even MCRA has not yet optimized its working mission statement of

"changing lives and reshaping futures for Jesus Christ." Daily, I find myself challenged by the conditions in our mission field and exasperated by the ostensible impotent engagement of our church and others in helping people access a better life. I long to see both our church and other entities partner with God and each other to facilitate miraculous transformation in the lives of our neighbors.

Statement of the Problem

The Beaumont, Texas area has a large number of individuals and families who are caught in the cycle of generational poverty. A significant number of persons seem unable or uninspired to break the cycle which is passed on generationally. This perception is supported by U.S. Census Bureau statistics for 2014 indicating that Beaumont's poverty rates of 23.2% exceed the national poverty rates of 14.8%. Also, Beaumont's 2014 median income was $39,191 as compared to the national median income of $53,482; 2010-2014 per capita income for Beaumont was $23,925 and $28,555 nationally (United States Department of Commerce). McCabe Roberts Avenue (MCRA) UMC and other entities including but not limited to other churches, not-for-profit charitable organizations, or businesses have either not done enough or done the right things to help break this cycle of poverty.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this study was to investigate what ministries MCRA might develop and how the church might collaborate with local ministry partners to help break the cycle of generational poverty in the Beaumont, Texas area.

Research Questions

Based on the problem detailed in the previous section, the researcher went to the field with the following questions:

Research Question #1

What ministries is McCabe Roberts Avenue (MCRA) UMC engaged in and what are the challenges to help break the cycle of generational poverty in the Beaumont, Texas area?

Research Question #2

What steps can McCabe Roberts Avenue (MCRA) UMC take to identify or develop a life transforming ministry which helps to break the cycle of generational poverty in the Beaumont, Texas area?

Research Question #3

How and with which local entities can McCabe Roberts Avenue (MCRA) UMC most effectively collaborate to help break the cycle of generational poverty?

Rationale for the Project

The first reason this study matters is that the generational poverty evidenced by the daily survival struggles of our neighbors provides MCRA with a great opportunity to embody its working mission statement which is *"changing lives and reshaping futures for Jesus Christ."* MCRA's working mission statement is consistent with the message contained in both The Great Commandment (Matt. 22.36-40) and The Great Commission (Matt. 28.16-20). In the Great Commandment, Jesus calls His believers to fully love God, others, and self. In the Great Commission, Jesus calls His believers to witness, evangelize, baptize and disciple throughout the world. This study can help MCRA, and

perhaps other churches, know how to help break poverty cycles in ways that witnesses Christ's active presence in the world. This research provides MCRA an opportunity to fulfill its working mission statement and respond to Christ's call to love and serve. The abundant life that Jesus came to provide for people is often not accessible to the generationally poor but their plight represents a chance for the church to fulfill Jesus' call to be light and salt (Matt. 5.13-16) in the world through life transforming ministry.

The second reason this study matters is that understanding the systemic nature of generational poverty can be vital to developing effective life transforming ministry to help break the poverty cycle. Stephen Pimpare contends that poverty is worse than you think, but it's different than you think, too. Although the official 2012 Census Bureau indicated that 15 percent of the population was considered poor, the numbers are far higher in the South and for African Americans and Hispanics which describes my research area. The research area for this paper located in Texas' 14th District has a poverty rate that is the 263th worst of America's 436 districts. Child poverty is the 286th worst, and the poverty rate for working women is the 279th worst ("Generational Poverty the Exception, Not the Rule"). Generational poverty has existed for a long time and efforts to deal with it have largely been futile. This perhaps indicates that the church needs to gain a better understanding of the nature of generational poverty before the church can effectively deal with it. MCRA and other churches, as well as countless other well-meaning entities, have provided temporary immediate relief to the poor which ostensibly did not result in life transformation. The actions of just giving to the generationally impoverished reflect the church's good intentions and possibly its best efforts. However, cycles of poverty are not being broken perhaps because the church

lacks clarity about how to effectively address the problem. In *Prophetic Preaching*, Tisdale quotes James A. Forbes Jr. who illustrated the need to build a bridge between the church's benevolent mission and larger systemic causes of poverty:

> To hear that there is a system of impoverishment that is structurally designed so that all our little benevolent works will not really change anything long term until the systems themselves are changed. Our good deeds may bring momentary amelioration to a few, but until the system has been confronted, the system that perpetuates the evil notion that poverty is acceptable, the Kingdom of God cannot and will not be advanced (55).

Through this research, the researcher discovered and developed an understanding that facilitates establishing meaningful ministries to help break the poverty cycle which might even result in a praxis which can serve as a duplicative model for others.

The third reason this study matters is that ostensibly far too many churches are having "good church" but not reaching their neighbors for Christ. The result is that the neighborhood does not improve but continues to regress educationally, economically, socially, physically, and morally. In *Walking with Nehemiah*, Joe Daniels states that "one of the greatest challenges to the church in the twenty-first century is its lack of connection to its community. Far too many churches today have become drive-in, spiritual social clubs and not the agents of community vitality and life transformation they used to be. As a result, communities are suffering, churches are dying, and far too many people are searching for hope in all the wrong places" (Introduction). God's reign is not expanded or tangible evidence is lacking to affirm Christ's active presence in the lives of the neighbors. The lack of improvement is visible not only through decaying

buildings but people who look worn out, tired, criminally suspicious, and just unhealthy. The power that God has embodied in His church and that the church so routinely proclaims should be evidenced in believers' works (cf. James 2.17) in the mission field.

The fourth reason this study matters is that the Kingdom of God can grow through effectively ministering with the generationally impoverished who are unchurched/de-churched/unsaved. Many unchurched/de-churched/unsaved persons classify themselves spiritually as "NONE." Many studies indicate that "NONE" is the fastest growing spiritual designation in America. Persons who identify as "NONE" often express belief in God but have little confidence in His church ("Nones" on the Rise). Some "NONEs" are totally turned off on church cultures, which they perceive as prejudicial, judgmental, boring, and irrelevant. Other "NONEs" are still open to church but either need more information about the Christian faith or need to experience unconditional acceptance as well as a profound encounter with the Risen Savior. Through this research, perhaps MCRA can learn how to be in ministry with the generationally impoverished who are also without a faith community. By broadening MCRA's understanding of the dynamics of generational poverty, perhaps God's Kingdom can grow through MCRA or other faith communities. Growing God's Kingdom represents a victory for Christ regardless of whether it happens at MCRA or another Christian faith community.

Definition of Key Terms

1. Mission Field and Project Research Area

This term means community or neighborhood. It is the geographical area where the local church serves by reaching their neighbors for Jesus Christ. MCRA's leadership

(McCabe Roberts Avenue UMC (MCRAUMC) Church Council) conducted a survey to determine the boundaries of their mission field. The task force recommended that they focus their spiritual, financial, human resources to help *"change lives and reshape futures for Jesus Christ"* in zip codes 77701 and 77705. MCRA is located in 77701, and 77705 is contiguous to the church's locale. While the mission field is as defined, the project research area covers the greater Beaumont, Texas area.

2. Emotional Intelligence, Social Intelligence, and Cultural Intelligence

Emotional Quotient measures **Emotional Intelligence** which includes abilities such as being able to motivate oneself and persist in the face of frustrations; to control impulse and delay gratification; to regulate one's moods and keep distress from swamping the ability to think; to empathize and to hope (Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* 34). **Social Intelligence**, measured by social quotient, is a discipline that evolved from emotional intelligence. Goleman writes "We are wired to connect. Neuroscience has discovered that our brain's very design makes it sociable…When I wrote *Emotional Intelligence*, my focus was on a crucial set of human capacities within an individual, the ability to manage our own emotions and our inner potential for positive relationships. Here the picture enlarges beyond a one-person psychology—those capacities an individual has within—to a two-person psychology: what transpires as we connect" (Goleman, *Social Intelligence* Ch. 1). Again, the health of social relationships can be a factor in poverty. Through this research, perhaps MCRA can discover ways to help people be healthy in relationships or identify affordable resources to help people who desire to mature in their social interactions. Cultural Quotient (CQ) measures cultural intelligence. **Cultural Intelligence** is the capability to relate and work effectively across cultures. CQ is

measured in four capabilities: 1. *Drive* measures interest and confidence; 2. *Knowledge* measures knowledge about cultural similarities and differences; 3. *Strategy* measures how one makes sense of culturally diverse experiences; and 4. *Action* measures a person's capability to adapt verbal and nonverbal behavior to make it appropriate to diverse cultures (Livermore Ch. 2). Both MCRA's diversity and the diversity within the community make cultural intelligence important to its being effective with each other and its mission field. Similarly, since America is becoming increasingly culturally diverse, the generationally impoverished and others can benefit from an expanded appreciation for and understanding of cultural diversity. Without such an appreciation and understanding, one's chances of transitioning out of generational poverty can be further diminished.

3. Systems Approach and Family Systems

Family theory maintains that such focus on the systemic forces of emotional process rather than on the content of specific symptoms is just as applicable whether the family problem surfaces as anorexia, senility, bad school habits, obesity, alcoholism, adultery, or chronic lower back pain. In family theory, there are five basic interrelated concepts that distinguish the family model from the individual model: 1. identified patient, 2. homeostasis, 3. differentiation of self, 4. the extended family field and 5. emotional triangles (Friedman 14-19). By observing trends and patterns within generationally poor families, MCRA can glean insight on how to develop effective ministry within the greater Beaumont area.

4. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (McLeod)

American Psychologist Abraham Maslow stated that people are motivated to achieve certain needs and that some needs take precedence over others. Our most basic need is for physical survival. It is important to note that Maslow's (1943, 1954) five stage model (depicted below) has been expanded to include cognitive, aesthetic and transcendence needs (Maslow, 1970). While he specifically based his theory on extraordinary high achievers, the concept of hierarchy of needs transcends class and can provide valuable insight for this ministry transformation project by increasing the understanding of the intricacies of poverty.

CHART 1.1 MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

5. Generational Poverty and Situational Poverty

Generational Poverty is defined as having been in poverty for at least two generations; however, the patterns begin to surface much sooner than two generations if the family lives with others who are from generational poverty. Situational Poverty is defined as a lack of resources due to a particular event (i.e. a death, chronic illness, divorce, etc.). Unlike generational poverty, it is focused largely on monetary resources and can be a temporary situation. Individuals in situational poverty usually have other resources intact, including cultural and social capital, along with the ability to use formal register (Payne Ch. 4).

Delimitations

MCRA's primary service location will be the church's properties in the 1200 block of Roberts Street in Beaumont, Texas. However, because a significant portion of this project relates to collaborative efforts, this project will consider the Greater Beaumont area as the locale to form partnerships to help break the cycle of generational poverty.

This research is focused on persons involved with entities which actively work to break the cycle of generational poverty. These entities were religious and secular not-for-profit organizations even though some of their collaboration occurs with other not-for-profits, profit based businesses, and upper middle class or wealthy benefactors.

While one of the key research resources (a Houston based Pastor) has a very significant ministry that has helped the homeless persons, street walkers and even active drug addicts move to self-sufficiency, the researcher did not interview these persons. The researcher chose to interview service providers to glean the depth of their experiences

rather than those who benefitted from the services. Some of the benefactors (clients) are still in unstable situations and may have a tenuous hold on reality precluding their being able to participate in a coherent conversation necessary to complete an interview. Additionally, the probability of some persons not having a stable living environment might make it impossible to follow up if further research were needed. The researcher interviewed this UMC Pastor and his key staff person primarily because for over twenty-five years, this ministry has moved poor people from dependence to self-sufficiency and this type of information can be applicable to MCRA's context.

Review of Relevant Literature

In this section, relevant literature is presented which will be useful in researching how MCRA can develop, implement, and sustain ministry which helps break the cycles of poverty through collaborative efforts in Beaumont, Texas. To accomplish this ministry will require MCRA to become more missional and strategic. Several authors suggest that the world has radically changed and the church continues to do ministry using an obsolete paradigm. In *Should We Change the Game Plan? From Traditional or Contemporary to Missional and Strategic* George G. Hunter III challenges the church to change to meet the current world and stop being intimidated by the current trend of overt secularization. In *Jesus Insurgency: The Church Revolution from the Edge*, the authors indicate that the decline in the UMC reflects its failure to connect with people's needs as it did during John Wesley's era (Rasmus and Escobedo-Frank). In both *Touch: Pressing against the Wounds of a Broken World* and *Love. Period.: When All Else Fails*, Rudy Rasmus expresses the role of unconditional love and acceptance in reaching people for Christ. Much of Pastor Rudy's experience reflects the ministry of this church where those on the

fringe of society are fully embraced, affirmed, and supported; those identified as on the fringe includes the poor.

To develop a ministry which addresses generational poverty in Beaumont, Texas also requires MCRA to be more intentional in spiritual disciplines particularly prayer, stewardship, and worship. In her book *Ultimately Responsible: When You're In Charge of Igniting A Ministry,* Pastor Kibbey explains the role of prayer in the leader's life. In a lecture, she recommended that the pastor model breakthrough prayer and encourage its use in the congregation's ministries. Breakthrough prayer's prophetic and visionary approach relies on boldly speaking words of faith related to how God is leading the congregation (Kibbey, "Growing Vibrant Churches"). In *Remembering the Future: Praying for the Church and Change,* Bishop Schnase provides guidance on making changes through prayer and holy conversations to help reverse the decline in the UMC. Prayer and holy conversations form crucial components of the Wesleyan heritage of making God real in this world particularly by considering the needs of the poor. J. Clif Christopher's book *Rich Church, Poor Church: Keys to Effective Financial Ministry* can be a helpful resource to guide MCRA's stewardship efforts to finance this ministry. The author contends that church members respond generously to mission rooted in prioritizing God and changing people's lives. Relevant worship is also crucial to transform the lives of those caught in generational poverty. Pastor Brown's book *Zero to 80: Innovative Ideas for Planting and Accelerating Church* can be a key resource to help refine worship to meet the needs of our mission field.

In *A Framework on Understanding Poverty: A Cognitive Approach*, Dr. Payne differentiates between generational poverty and situational poverty and offers insights on

the differences between the classes as well as the unspoken rules on how classes live. She also has a publication called *From Understanding Poverty to Developing Human Capacity: Ruby Payne's Articles on Transforming Individuals, Families, Schools, Churches, and Communities* which deals with helping to raise achievement, grow needed resources, and stimulate personal and professional growth. Authors such as Paul Gorski ("The Myth of the Culture of Poverty") challenge the culture of poverty theory (fundamental to Dr. Ruby Payne's work) which contends that lifestyles create poverty. The culture of poverty theory has been used to formulate "anti-poverty" policies and practices by completely focusing on detrimental behavior (effects of poverty) without examining systemic issues such as institutional classism which causes poverty to be cyclic by stimulating hopelessness in the poor.

Poverty in America: A Handbook can be a useful resource to explain the dynamics of poverty including how poverty is ingrained in children at very young ages. John Iceland also deals with varying dynamics of poverty as it relates to different ethnicities. In *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help (And How to Reverse It)* John Lupton urges individuals, churches, and organizations to step away from spontaneous, often destructive acts of compassion toward thoughtful paths to community development. Lupton delivers strategies for moving from "toxic charity" to transformative charity which can help MCRA formulate more effective approaches to dealing with generational poverty. Crucial in these resources is the role and/or extent of institutions and individuals in perpetuating poverty. While there maybe consensus that the individual and families must take responsibility in moving to self-sufficiency, there is wide disagreement about whether the causes are primarily the actions of the

individuals/families (*"culture of poverty*) or institutions (greed motivated systemic issues such as classism and its subcategories of racism/sexism/ageism).

Mobilizing for the Common Good: The Lived Theology of John M. Perkins is a comprehensive resource which addresses colloborative strategies for community development in the context of faith based ministries helping the poor move toward self-sufficiency. Rev. Perkins developed a concept called the 3-Rs which stand for relocation, redistribution, and reconciliation. Dr. Perkins' evangelistic and economic development ministries relied on collaborative efforts which could contain meaningful ideas for MCRA's context.

Research Methodology

In this section, the researcher explained the methods used to accomplish the purpose of the project. These methods were designed to answer the research questions which prompted by the statement of the problem. This section covers the following areas: type of research, participants, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, and generalizability.

This project explores the causes and effects of generational poverty in order to develop life transforming ministry. First, this paper explores causes and effects and then explores the relationship, if any, with systemic institutional barriers and personal lifestyles. The systemic institutional barriers covered issues such as classism and its subcategories of racism, sexism, and ageism. Unproductive personal lifestyles were examined in light of the extent that detrimental behavior perpetuates generational poverty. Developing life transforming ministry to help break the cycle of generational poverty required in-depth research.

Type of Research

The researcher chose qualitative research because its five characteristics will satisfy the purpose of this project: 1. the goal of eliciting understanding and meaning, 2. researcher as primary instrument of data collection and analysis, 3. the use of fieldwork, 4. an inductive orientation to analysis, and 5. findings that are richly descriptive. Since qualitative research is grounded in the social world of experience and seeks to make sense of lived experiences (Sensing, 57) the researcher believed that this was the optimal way to get the most usable results. This qualitative research design is Pre-Intervention because the researcher sought to know 1. what McCabe Roberts Avenue (MCRA) UMC is currently doing to help break the cycle of generational poverty and related collaborative efforts, 2. what MCRA can learn from other churches' experiences and collaborations, and 3. what other not-for-profit entities are doing to help break the cycle of generational poverty through collaborative efforts and how MCRA might participate with these philanthropic organizations.

Participants

For research question #1, the researcher used a focus group composed of McCabe Roberts Avenue (MCRA) UMC's leadership. This focus group was comprised of four leaders who participate in MCRA's Re-Imagining Seminars where they meet to pray, plan, prepare, and participate in reshaping the church's ministries to better participate with what God is currently doing in this ministry context. These persons are directly involved in MCRA's ministries and thereby possess keen insights on what the church is doing to help break the cycle of generational poverty.

For research question #2, the participants included two pastors and their key support staff persons totaling four persons interviewed. These two clergypersons pastor different churches, one a United Methodist Church (UMC) in Downtown Houston and the other a church about two miles from MCRA in the contiguous zip code (77705) which is a part of MCRA's mission field. The Houston based UMC (St. John's Downtown) is renowned for doing over twenty-five years of ministry with the poor, and the Beaumont based church (Harvest for Lost Souls) is doing ministry with the poor in the same neighborhood where MCRA is located. These two different church contexts allowed the researcher to glean similar themes with variances to more clearly identify how churches can do ministry with the poor. By conducting separate interviews with both the pastor and a key staff person, the researcher secured a greater depth of responses.

For research question #3, two different entities were sourced by interviewing two managers at one agency and four at another agency totaling six participants. These two entities are intricately involved in helping to break generational poverty through collaborative efforts. These two entities vary in size, duration, and foci. The researcher believed that the differences in these entities provided an opportunity to glean similar themes with variances to more clearly identify collaborative possibilities. With the newer identity, the researcher separately interviewed the managers who participate in the same mission but with different responsibilities. This approach allowed for a wider range and quality of responses. With the older more established entity, the Executive Director and two managers (outgoing and her recent replacement) were interviewed together and a separate interview was conducted with another manager. This approach provided a depth of response much greater than initially anticipated because the Executive Director was

not originally planned as a respondent. However, he offered an overview that exceeded what might have been gleaned by just interviewing the managers.

Instrumentation

The researcher used open-ended questions requiring elucidatory responses. These open-ended questions were presented to a Focus Group and through Semi-Structured Interviews. For Research Question #1, the researcher presented five open-ended questions to a Focus Group. For Research Questions #2 and #3, the researcher presented five open-ended questions for all of the Semi-Structured Interviews. The sub-questions for Research Questions #2 and #3 were not the same set of queries.

Data Collection

Research was conducted in December 2016 and the first week of January 2017 in the participants' offices/churches.

For research question #1, the researcher designed five open-ended questions which were verbally responded to by a focus group composed of McCabe Roberts Avenue (MCRA) UMC leaders. The focus group was comprised of MCRA's leaders who participate in its on-going Re-Imaging Seminars to revitalize the church's ministries. The Focus Group was held at MCRA UMC in a secluded room during a very low activity time to ensure confidentiality and minimal distraction. Prior consents were obtained related to the purpose, duration, intended use, volunteer nature of participation, and the right to withdraw at any time. Consents for the focus group also included permission to digitally record the session, and manual notes were taken. The recorded sessions were professionally transcribed to facilitate review, analysis, and synthesis.

For research question #2, the researcher designed a semi-structured interview. This semi-structured interview used five inquires designed to obtain information related to the research question. These in-person interviews were conducted separately with the pastor and his support staff person at their church locations. All interviews were digitally recorded, and manual notes were taken during the interviews. Prior consents were obtained related to the purpose, duration, electronic recording, intended use, volunteer nature of participation, and the right to withdraw at any time. The recorded sessions were professionally transcribed to facilitate review, analysis, and synthesis.

For research question #3, the researcher designed a semi-structured interview. This semi-structured interview used five inquires designed to obtain information related to the research question. These in-person interviews were conducted separately with two managers of one entity; with the other entity, the researcher interviewed the Executive Director with two managers (outgoing and recent replacement hire) and conducted a separate interview with a manager with different responsibilities than the other persons interviewed. All interviews were digitally recorded, and manual notes were taken during the interview process. Prior consents were obtained related to the purpose, duration, digital recording, intended use, volunteer nature of participation, and the right to withdraw at any time. The recorded sessions were professionally transcribed to facilitate review, analysis, and synthesis.

Data Analysis

The transcribed qualitative raw data generated during the research process was compiled into logical, meaningful categories to examine in a holistic fashion in an attempt to communicate the interpretation to others. The researcher observed and

evaluated words, gestures, actions, and practices (thick descriptions) to give a fuller interpretation of implied range of meaning of the social settings, actions, and words gleaned during the focus group and interviews. Moschella's three ways to read data were used: 1. a literal reading highlighting particular words, phrases, language, interruptions, and gestures, 2. an interpretive reading in which the researcher selected and organized recorded interviews and written notes according to implied or inferred meanings, and 3. a reflexive reading that brought to bear my personal feelings and understandings of the data. The researcher also generated themes, categories, and patterns through a close inspection of and analysis of data. Both slippages and silences were considered (Sensing 194-198).

Generalizability

The researcher believes that there is a high likelihood that someone else could repeat this research and discover many of the same things. Possible differences could emerge which reflect the biases of the participants, outsiders, and researcher. However, these differences should not be so skewed as to invalidate the general findings of this project.

Project Overview

This project explores the causes and effects of generational poverty in order to develop life transforming ministry. Chapter Two identifies and discusses relevant literature related to the topic of poverty formatted in three subtopics: Biblical and Theological, Theoretical and Historical Context, and Missional and Strategic. Chapter Three outlines the use of qualitative research methods the researcher used for this Pre-Intervention project. Chapter Four analyzes the findings that emerge from such

qualitative methods as a focus group and semi-structured interviews. Chapter Five outlines the study's major findings with implications for each discovery now and in the future.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

Chapter 2 covers the literature review for this project on breaking the cycle of generational poverty. Presented in this chapter is the author's interaction with literature related to the topic of generational poverty. This research proposed to address generational poverty by: 1. Defining poverty's causes and effects with a specific emphasis on generational poverty, 2. Determining spiritual disciplines needed for McCabe Roberts Avenue (MCRA) UMC to grow God's Kingdom by igniting, empowering and sustaining an effective ministry with the generationally impoverished in Beaumont, Texas, 3. Using the understanding of generational poverty to explore ministry approaches to break the cycle of poverty, and 4. Identifying collaborative resource potential or ideas through connectional support, ecumenical cooperation, individual and institutional support in the form of community organizations and businesses.

This chapter layout is subdivided into three major topical areas: 1. Biblical and Theological, 2. Theoretical and Historical Context, and 3. Missional and Strategic. The purpose of the Biblical and Theological section is to present understandings based on God's Word and theological hermeneutics about the poor and the faith community's responsibility to the poor. The Theoretical and Historical Context section deals with how perspectives on the poor influenced and formulated public policy that continues to determine how poor people are dealt with and how the poor respond/react to their condition. Contextually relevant historical data is presented as deemed necessary to

support the theoretical, and therefore it is neither exhaustive nor sequential. Missional and Strategic presents prevailing ideas on how the church has dealt with the poor and how the church can deal with the poor to be more effective. This Missional and Strategic section is multifaceted in that it deals with *spiritual disciplines, ministry initiatives* and *collaborative efforts.* The subsection on *spiritual disciplines* identifies practices necessary to ignite, empower, and sustain the ministry with the poor. The intention of making *spiritual disciplines* key is to ensure that God not only works through the MCRA church family but also with this church family so that our work draws us closer to Jesus Christ and expands God's Kingdom. *Ministry initiatives* present various approaches to dealing with generational poverty in an effort to highlight some which have proven to be effective. Making *collaborative efforts* key acknowledges that the enormity and complexity of generational poverty requires partnering with others to ensure greater effectiveness evidenced by tangible measurable results.

Biblical and Theological

The good news announced by the prophet Jesus is that the Kingdom of God belongs to the poor (Luke 1.52, 6.20, 7.22, 16.19-31). This announcement is not delivered from on high by a member of the privileged population, but by one who is himself among the poor. Jesus speaks to the poor as one of them. Luke shows him embodying poverty even as he announces God's rule to the poor. The circumstances of Jesus' birth point to a degree of actual poverty as well as spiritual receptivity (Johnson Ch 6).

The Bible calls believers to serve the poor. The poor are mentioned in the Bible over 400 times. "As modeled by Jesus and the early church, believers today are to live in

community with those from all walks of life" (Wheeler 2). "The biblical view of persons means that economic injustice is a family problem. We are all 'God's offspring' (Acts 17.24-29) because we all have the same Father. Therefore, all human beings are sisters and brothers." As Sider notes, "Exploitation is a brother or sister treating another brother or sister as a mere object. Poverty is wrong not just because it means financial hardship but also because it involves exclusion from community" (53). "The intersection of YHWH and bodily reality is narrated in the prophetic tradition in Jeremiah 22.15-16 wherein caring for the poor is to know YHWH" (Brueggeman 28).

"There are 167 uses of the word 'poor' in the Hebrew Bible and 37 in the New Testament. The first words Luke recorded of Jesus' post-baptismal ministry are Isaiah's promise of deliverance for the poor (Luke 4.16-21). Throughout Jesus' ministry, these words of Isaiah were a road map. He provided blessings to persons experiencing many types of scarcity of resources. It wasn't just about money, Jesus truly loved the poor" (Carter and Johnson-Hicks 1-3). "The master sought out the least, rounded them up even, not to throw them in jail, out of sight of the important guests, but to bring them to the table, to welcome them and to offer them a feast" (LaGrone 20-22). Relatedly, Dawn states "It seems to me that if we eat the body and blood of Christ in expensive churches without care for the hungry, the sacrament is no longer a foretaste of the feast to come, but a trivialized picnic to which not everyone is invited" (Dawn, *Powers, Weakness, and the Tabernacling of God* Ch. 3). In the language of the gospels the poor means all those disadvantaged people who suffer any sort of affliction, economic, physical, social and spiritual.

"Poverty is not merely an economic but also sociological concept. Although popularly believed to be poor [as evidenced in preceding statements], Jesus came from the middle class of skilled workers. However, Jesus 'mixed socially with the lowest of the low and identified with them. He became an outcast *by choice*.' He *adopted* the condition of poverty and expected His disciples-at least some of them-to do the same" (Nissen 12, 144). Jesus sympathizes with and associates with the poor. In spite of the prevailing "prosperity gospel" message which considers wealth a reward for faithfulness and poverty as evidence of being out of favor with God, scripture states that the poor are blessed and that Christians should be less concerned with material wealth and more concerned with spiritual wealth (Cokesbury 1). "The rich ruler who asked Jesus "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" was disappointed when Jesus said, "sell all you have and distribute to the poor" (Luke 18.18-27 ESV). Jesus called the rich ruler to recognize an utter lack of self-sufficiency in himself before God (rather than a total dependency on financial wealth) (Devine 1-6). Accordingly, these resources convey the idea that poverty is a spiritual issue involving our relationship with God's Creation including those made in His image.

In *Follow Me to Freedom: Leading and Following as an Ordinary Radical*, Claiborne and Perkins write:

> God expects the faith community's response to be congruent with His Word, particularly the words and actions of Jesus Christ. The Scriptures are about a God who feels the pain of the people, who hears the cries of the slaves in Egypt and rescues them, who is continually responding to the pain. The coming of Jesus is about God entering the pain. Pain is where Jesus began. He did not

> arrive as a celebrity messiah everyone was expecting. He came unassumingly as the suffering servant, the baby refugee, the homeless rabbi—the God who suffers. Jesus did not simply come to help the poor; He came as the poor. Mother Teresa used to say that we cannot understand the poor until we stand under the poor and live among them. Romans 8.22 speaks about how the world aches. It says that all of creation is groaning for its liberation, like a mother giving birth. Then Paul writes, "And we have begun to *ache* with it." Every leader who is not indigenous to struggle needs to take that pilgrimage into the pain (46-47).

This understanding calls believers to mimic Jesus by developing authentic relationships with the poor by becoming immersed in their daily experiences.

In Matthew 26.11 (NASB), Jesus says, *"For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have Me."* "This text can be heard to justify anything from indifference and resignation to sustained compassion" (Taylor 25). Wafawanaka uses Deuteronomy 15 to explain Jesus' words by saying:

> For those believing, it calls for sustained compassion. Jesus' proclamation is a serious and stinging indictment for failure to heed the biblical mandate particularly found in the release laws in Deuteronomy 15. If the biblical mandate is adhered, there would be no poor people among the Israelites. Jesus tells those complaining about the wasted expensive oil poured on His head in preparation for burial that they show kindness to the poor whenever they needed to ("Is the Biblical Perspective on Poverty That 'there Shall Be No Poor among You' or 'you Will Always Have the Poor with You'? 107-120).

This explanation of scripture calls for debt cancellation for the poor to allow them to ascend out of poverty.

Sugirtharajah also believes that "Jesus' comment that the poor are always with you comes specifically from Deuteronomy 15:11 relating to the Sabbatical year provisions which provide institutional safeguards against permanent pauperization." The author writes:

> The only way to remove the structure of inequality is to give the underprivileged a new beginning-a fresh start in life. Unless there is a collective conversion to solidarity with the marginalized, the poor will continue exist. Believers often tolerate the poor among us by taking Jesus' words out of context: "For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me" (Mark 14.7 NASB). While believers might rationalize that they are celebrating the "presence of Jesus" in their midst, they forget that the poor are also always with them, and that they need to attend to them (102-109).

This exegetical understanding of Deuteronomy 15 places responsibilities on believers to act so that the poor are empowered.

The Gospels promote feeding the hungry by recounting Jesus' feeding miracle six times. Additionally, on one occasion He admonishes the disciples by saying "You give them something to eat" (Matthew 14.16 NKJV). "The gospels also promote feeding the hungry through eschatological parables, warning people that they will be judged if they do not feed the hungry" (Webster 363-373). Deuteronomy 15.7-11 shows that an openhanded disposition toward the poor is required: "The poor will always be with you in

your land, and that is why I command you to be openhanded toward any of your countrymen there who are in poverty and need." "Jesus uses this text to expose their insincerity" (Til 441-466). Also, Jesus' words in Matthew 26.11 are not the mark of callous indifference to the poor. "Jesus artfully connects the cancelling of debts (cf. Deut. 15) with His death at Passover time which will make possible the cancelling of [humankind's] debt to God, bringing the forgiveness of sin. Sabbatical freedom and Passover redemption surely belong together" (Riggans 15-16). Jesus' words about the poor always being with you conveys an expectation for believers to faithfully adhere to the commands in Deuteronomy 15 to ensure that poor people have a fresh start and assistance in achieving a more bountiful life.

The definitions of nine Hebrew words (with multiple variations) used in the Old Testament for poverty are:

1. "the poor as oppressed, downtrodden, humiliated;"
2. "the poor as powerless and diminished;"
3. "the poor as yearning and insistent;"
4. "the poor as defenseless and open to exploitation;"
5. "the poor as needy and in want;"
6. "the poor as subject and dependent;"
7. "the poor as diminished and impoverished;"
8. "the poor as destitute and bereft;" and
9. "the poor as dispossessed and evicted."

"The poverty of 'the wretched of the earth' is clearly shown to be *caused by injustice*. The *economic* poverty they experience is the result of the prior *social* poverty that is

politically structured and maintained. Biblically, they are powerless and poor because others are powerful and rich" (Landon 126-127).

"Throughout history a proportion of the earth's population has always enjoyed an abundance of the goods available at any one time while a proportion suffered want of the most basic goods needed to sustain life. The underlying theme of *Power and Poverty: Divine and Human Rule in a World of Need* is that poverty has to do with the way in which human beings use the power God gave us when He created us. The Book of Origins (Gen. 1-11) ends with the two defining stories of human history. On the one hand, is the story of the Tower of Babel, which epitomizes the pride of human beings in their rebellion against God as they seek to concentrate power and build an empire (which inevitably involves violence and oppression). On the other hand, is the genealogy of Noah's son Shem down to Abram, who was destined to be the source of God's alternative way of giving power away" (Hughes 11-12). God's alternative way of sharing that avails goods to all stands in direct opposition to the worldly oppressive systems which are rooted in a "survival of the fittest" mentality.

The existence of poverty affects all humanity, whether poor or rich. The biblical evidence outlined the many responsibilities of the rich to the poor. It also pointed out the responsibilities of the poor to themselves (Wafawanaka, Am I Still My Brother's Keeper? Biblical Perspectives on Poverty 161) The Book of the Covenant prohibits lending money at interest to other members of the covenant people, specifically the poor (cf. Isa. 3.15). Like the warnings against abusing resident aliens, widows, and orphans (Exod. 22.21-24), the instructions about loans to the poor in verses 25-27 are formulated in the first and second person-a direct address by God to His people. In this way, God places Himself

directly in the role of special protector to the poor (Baker 257-258). Perhaps these provisions were designed to prevent what we now know as "pay-day" or "title loans" which charge exorbitant interest to the poor. "The Sinai agreement read from the scroll of Deuteronomy indicated that everything depended upon justice to the *widow*, the *orphan*, and the *stranger*. In the interpretation of Moses, these three, together with the poor, became the test of obedience to the provisions of Sinai" (Brueggeman 51).

The Song of Solomon provides a rich expression of intimate love and seeking the best for a lover. This love is something that poverty strips from families and married couples in particular. Barker mentioned that anthropologists such as Oscar Lewis found that where there is poverty and injustice, domestic violence is soon found.

> It is as if poverty emasculates a man, and he seeks to prove his masculinity in unhealthy and often violent ways to those over whom he can have power. God's way, expressed in the Song of Solomon, is that relationships between husband and wife be intimate, celebratory, deeply loving (78-79).

While poverty cannot justify or excuse domestic violence, it might explain the proclivity to violence that occurs in poorer families. However, that violence also occurs with persons in other economic stratums may indicate other causes.

Christian economics offers a concept of objective revelation by a true Person, the Creator of all knowledge and the Lord of history. Christian economics (the guided-market system) works best when grounded in themes of freedom, justice, and responsibility: 1. The vision of freedom is expressed in Leviticus 25.8-55 (the Jubilee year) which speaks of a freedom from economic and social captivity; 2. Justice as recorded in Micah 6.8 (…to act justly…) and Amos 5.24 "Let justice roll on like a river;"

and 3. Responsibility for God's Creation as expressed in the Genesis creation story and Psalm 24.1 (Diehl, Gish and Gladwin 33, 87-89). Meeks explains Christian economics in this way:

> Scarcity, it is claimed, is the universal presupposition of exchange relationships. No matter how much society produces, there will always be scarcity because human beings always want more. The biblical traditions uncover God as the economist who constructs the household with a radically different assumption: *If* the righteousness of God is present, there is always enough to go around. From the manna in the desert, to Jesus' feeding of the multitudes, to the Lord's Supper, the biblical traditions depict the superabundance of God's Spirit as the starting point of God's household and its practice of hospitality. Thus, the doctrine of God should follow the biblical claim of the fullness of God's being rather than the modern economic assumption of the formal emptiness of God's being, which can be filled or negated by human impulses to self-possession, autonomous individualism, and greed (12).

A theological perspective that is mostly ecclesiological concerns the seven attributes of an authentic church: "1. The authentic church absorbs pain (Jesus explained his mission as one of bringing good news to the poor and the suffering cf. Luke 4); 2. The authentic community of believers is also called to proclaim hope in a despairing world; 3. The authentic church should point to God's authority; 4. The authentic church brings people together; 5. The authentic church spends lavishly on the needy (When the community of faith assembles and takes an offering, God intends for this giving to

benefit others, particularly the needy.); 6. The authentic church reflects God's character (compassion, gracious giving, and tenderness); and 7. The authentic community of faith protects the vulnerable (God's most terrible wrath is reserved for people who have either ignored the plight of the poor or who have oppressed the poor—Isaiah 58.1, 6)" (Perkins, Beyond Charity: The Call to Christian Community Development 45-53).

In *Advocating for Justice*, the authors explain that biblical advocacy is seen in light of the character of God beginning with creation and flowing through salvation history with missional purposes. "Believers image God. They advocate for others and learn and work with them to advocate for themselves (especially people trapped in poverty, widows, aliens, and orphans) because God advocates for them. And believers do so by being faithful to the way that God advocates for the world: through service, love, weakness, and even suffering. The God of the Bible is a God who yearns for justice for the poor in the face of unjust structures and systems." These authors further write that:

> Evangelical transformational advocacy as intentional acts of witness by the body of Christ that hold people and institutions accountable for creating, implementing, and sustaining just and good policies and practices geared toward the flourishing of society. Transformational advocacy challenges injustice and obstacles to human flourishing at whatever level it is practiced by humbly engaging with people who can address the wrong, trusting God's Spirit to change all those involved as well as the institutions themselves. (Offutt, Bronkema and Murphy Ch. 1, 3).

The writers explained that although believers have traditionally addressed individual relational matters of poverty, it is imperative to also address root causes which tend to be more systemic and institutional.

"The apocalyptic orientation of early Christianity has shaped the New Testament's most fundamental assumption about the poor and poverty: whatever believers may do to help the poor or end poverty will be only partially successful. This world suffers under the oppression of the powers of evil, whose defeat will become complete only at the end of this age. But this apocalyptic perspective did not exempt the first Christians from the struggle against oppression and injustice, nor did it excuse them from the obligation to be generous to those in need. When Christ returns, He will join the efforts of believers to His own struggle with evil and then present a new and transformed world to God-a world of justice, peace, and love" (Hoppe 164). While Christians anticipate the ultimate victorious return of Christ, they must work to eliminate oppression knowing that the task will never be fully achieved before the Second Coming.

In *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach*, the author writes: "A priority for the poor is not on the U.S. political agenda today, and we are called to march 'around our United States' Capitol seven times,' as Andy Young did in the 1960s, clamoring with all the passion of the widow, "Justice, Give us Justice! Justice for these children of God". The author quotes James A. Forbes Jr. who illustrates the need to build a bridge between the church's benevolent mission and larger systemic causes of poverty:

> To hear that there is a system of impoverishment that is structurally designed so that all our little benevolent works will not really change anything long term until the systems themselves are changed. Our good deeds may bring

> momentary amelioration to a few, but until the system has been confronted, the system that perpetuates the evil notion that poverty is acceptable, the Kingdom of God cannot and will not be advanced, (Tisdale Ch. 4).

Tisdale recounts the actions of Civil Rights leader and legislator Rev. Andy Young and the keen observations of Dr. Forbes to amplify the need to challenge structural causal inequities in the fight against poverty.

"Scripture presents creative tension between adhering to humanity's laws and God's laws. Christians who are oppressed should first fight their battles in prayer, make every effort to overcome evil with good, strive to obey God first and foremost, and trust that He will deliver justice for them in due time (1 Peter 5.10). Scripture also shows that there are times when 'we must obey God rather than [humankind],' (cf. Acts 5.29). This departure from the role of obeying governing authorities reflects God's commands in Scripture that rulers must govern with fairness and righteousness (Jer. 22.3), deliver the poor and needy (Ps. 82.4), rescue those being led away to death (Prov. 24.11), judge impartially (Deut. 1.17), and not pervert justice and take bribes (Deut. 16.19)" (Claiborne and Perkins 46-47). This resource prescribes justifications to peacefully challenge injustices that may cause or perpetuate generational poverty in McCabe Roberts Avenue UMC's context.

In 2015 on April 15th, thirty-six international faith-based organizations convened by the World Bank issued a joint statement entitled *Ending Extreme Poverty: A Moral and Spiritual Imperative* by 2030. It states:

> We in the faith community embrace this moral imperative because we share the belief that the moral test of our society is how the weakest and most vulnerable

> are faring. Our sacred texts also call us to combat injustice and uplift the poorest in our midst. No one, regardless of sex, age, race, or belief, should be denied experiencing the fullness of life. . . Ending extreme poverty will require a comprehensive approach that tackles its underlying causes—including preventable illness, a lack of access to quality education, joblessness, corruption, violent conflicts, and discrimination against women, ethnic minorities and other groups. It will also necessitate a change in the habits that cause poverty---greed and waste, numbness to the pain of others, and exploitation of people and the natural world. It calls for a holistic and sustainable approach that transforms cultures and institutions, and hearts as well as minds. (Carlos 1-2).

The initiative highlights an intentional international proposal to address the underlying causes of poverty.

This aforementioned international initiative is commendable but might not be holistic enough. In *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission,* Newbigin uses Gutierrez's definition of a comprehensive approach to liberation. Gutierrez calls for: "1. Political liberation which emphasizes the conflict between oppressor and the oppressed; 2. Cultural liberation which emphasizes the need for the oppressed to consciously assume responsibility to participate in their own liberation; and 3. Spiritual liberation through Christ---liberation from sin and restoration to fellowship with God" (Ch. 8). The mandate to end extreme poverty by 2030 ostensibly focuses on political liberation with a nebulous marginal emphasis on cultural liberation and appears silent on the matter of spiritual liberation. Cultural liberation must be addressed because it recognizes that although institutional systems bear the burden of

fault for poverty, the poor must still responsibly participate in their own liberation. Spiritual liberation could be perceived as threatening to the unity of this multi-faith coalition. However, faith-based organizations share a moral compass which provides guidance on how to live life to its fullest in spite of their different ways of expressing it. Therefore, all three types of liberation could be helpful to enhance this international agenda to end extreme poverty.

Theoretical and Historical Context

The Harvard Economist John Kenneth Galbraith sparked dialogue on poverty when he first published *The Affluent Society* in 1958. The book outlined the manner in which the post-World War II United States was becoming wealthy in the private sector but remained poor in the public sector, lacking social and physical infrastructure, and perpetuating income disparities. Dr. Galbraith believed that America must transition from a private production economy to a public investment economy. He advocated three large proposals: the elimination of poverty, government investment in public schools, and the growth of the "New Class" (schoolteachers, professors, surgeons, and electrical engineers). To fund social programs, Galbraith believed in the expanded use of consumption taxes (100, 109, 158, 170, 259-260).

In 1962, Michael Harrington published *The Other America* citing that "the familiar America is one that has the highest mass standard of living the world has ever known, but there is another America which is invisible and poor allowing it to slip out of the very experience and consciousness of the nation. The poor are also politically invisible because they do not belong to unions, fraternal organizations, or political parties

and certainly do not have lobbies of their own. They have no face; they have no voice" (1-4).

According to Marva J. Dawn, "American civilization flaunts its wealth, while poverty escalates. Laws favor the rich even as the safety net is ripped away from the helpless. While believes certainly shouldn't advocate inept welfare that fails to equip citizens with skills for economic survival, they must acknowledge current governmental policies are harming their neighbors" (The Sense of the Call Ch. 1). In 1964, while accepting the Nobel Peace Prize, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke of a bold vision in which everyone on earth would enjoy safety and security: *"*I have the audacity to believe that peoples everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality, and freedom for their spirits" (qtd. in Seefeldt and Graham 34-35).

The widely read and well-respected educator Dr. Ruby K. Payne defines poverty as the extent to which an individual does without resources. Dr. Payne defines these resources as:

1. Financial**:** having the money to purchase goods and services;
2. Emotional**:** being able to choose and control emotional responses, particularly to negative situations, without engaging in self-destructive behavior;
3. Mental/Cognitive**:** having the mental abilities and acquired skills (reading, writing, computing) to deal effectively with daily life;
4. Spiritual**:** believing in divine purpose and guidance;
5. Physical**:** having physical health and mobility;

6. Support Systems**:** having friends, family, and backup resources available to access in times of need;
7. Relationships/Role Models**:** having frequent access to individual(s) who are appropriate, who are nurturing, and who do not engage in self-destructive behavior;
8. Knowledge of Hidden Rules**:** knowing the unspoken cues and habits of different groups; and
9. Language/Formal Register**:** being able to competently, use the vocabulary and sentence structure of work and school (*A Framework for Understanding Poverty* Ch. 1).

Dr. Payne states that financial resources alone will not alleviate poverty.

"Dr. Payne uses Hart and Risely's research to explain the intergenerational transfer of knowledge. Hart and Risely discovered that by age 3, educated families have heard 30 million more words than children from less educated, welfare families. Also, in welfare families' positive affirmations are 1; whereas, working class families are 2 and professional families are 6. Yet, welfare children receive twice as many negative comments when compared to working class and professional families" (Ch. 2). The social context of the home environment for poor children does not transfer the same intellectual capital or positive emotional support necessary to properly develop and successfully participate in world.

Dr. Payne contends that understanding the hidden rules of the classes are key to advancement either within the class or to the next class (Ch. 3). The temporary lack of resources is defined as situational poverty. When the lack passes generationally, it is

defined as generational poverty. Some realities of generational poverty are: "1. Instability of housing; 2. Violence; 3. Food insecurity; 4. Unemployment/underemployment; 5. Unaddressed health issues; 6. Frequent exposure to addiction; 7. Predators (both inside and outside the group); 8. Periodic homelessness; 9. Crowded housing/lack of personal space; 10. Incarceration; 11. Lots of time at agencies getting assistance; 12. Uneducated/undereducated adults; 13. Limited knowledge bases; and 14. Death [or the threat of death]." "Some patterns associated with generational poverty could be described as excessive continuous noise, matriarchal structures, violence, survival orientation, males as lover/fighter, and discipline functions as punishment rather than opportunity for change" (Ch. 4). Dr. Payne's views explain the causes of generational poverty as originating in a mindset which by defying conventional societal norms results in destructive behavioral patterns transferred generationally through the family system thus creating a *"culture of poverty"*.

While Dr. Payne did not originate this *"*culture of poverty" approach, it has dominated public policy, practices, and perceptions of the poor. The influence of the "culture of poverty" approach and its pervasive use evidences its great support; yet, it also has its well versed and documented detractors. In *Re-evaluating the Culture of Poverty*, Suh and Heise share insights from a roundtable discussion with academicians Kaaryn Gustafson and Mario Luis Small. Suh and Heise introduce the article by stating that "the phrase 'culture of poverty' was originally coined by Oscar Lewis who believed that children growing up in poor families would learn to adapt to the values and norms that perpetuated poverty." Gustafson states that "the current understanding of the 'culture of poverty' suggests that poverty is intractable and dismisses the idea that policy changes

can lower the rate of poverty in the United States or address the concentration of poverty in certain populations such as African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans and recent Asian immigrants, the disabled, and the parents of young children." Mario Luis Small adds that "the Black subculture is *not* a 'culture of poverty'-it does not inhibit success due to its inherent attributes-it may inhibit success, due to how people who share it are considered in the larger society…distinguishing between a 'culture' that inhibits success because of inherent qualities (e.g. not valuing hard work) and a culture that inhibits success because of the (racist) orientation of a dominant (and sometimes others in the subordinate) group towards people within that culture is crucial, but too often missing from discussions of the culture and poverty" (1-8).

According to Paul Gorski, "the myth of a 'culture of poverty' distracts us from a dangerous culture that does exist-the culture of classism. This culture leads the most-well intentioned of us into low expectations for low-income students. It diverts attention from what people in poverty *do* have in common: inequitable access to basic human rights" (32-36). These critics of the prevailing "culture of poverty" concept explicate that systemic issues such as classism or its subcategories of racism, sexism, and ageism must be a crucial part of the dialogue and policy-making if America hopes to curtail generational poverty.

Some academics contend that Dr. Payne perpetuates classism by not considering causes and effects of poverty. Her popularity and wide use by school districts does not satisfy academics who note that she reinforces a *deficit perspective* of the poor and has not supported her self-published work by research nor peer review. Another critic indicates that Payne's generational poverty reinforces stereotypes and hidden rules

simulate pop psychology. However, he believes that Dr. Payne's Instruction and Improving Achievement strategies can help teachers better educate the poor (Reinke 2). These academics believe that Dr. Payne's work influences teachers to have low expectations of poor students which adversely affects their performances.

In *Miseducating Teachers about the Poor: A Critical Analysis of Ruby Payne's Claims*, the academics' indicated that "her work represents a classic example of *deficit thinking*. They found that her truth claims, offered without any supporting evidence, are contradicted by anthropological, sociological and other research on poverty. They contended that teachers may be misinformed by Payne's claims which lead them to have low expectations of the poor students." Further, "many of Payne's representations of the daily lives of the poor emphasize depravity, perversity, or criminality. Payne's selective representations are negative stereotypes that essentialize poor people as immoral, violent, and socially deficient. Her representations do not account for the majority of low-income people who work hard, obey the law, and do not exhibit the behaviors and attitudes that Payne has described" (Bomer, Dworin and May 2497-2531). These scholars believe that Dr. Payne's work is not supported by other social disciplines and her highly negative stereotypes stigmatize the majority of family orientated law-abiding hard-working poor.

Another resource contains explanations and critiques of the "culture of poverty" as well as observations shared by those who experience poverty daily. Charles A. Valentine condenses the *"culture of poverty"* into five propositions: "1. lack of participation in the larger society by the poor, 2. different values, 3. no local social organization among the poor beyond the family, unstable family life and weak identity,

4. character and 5. worldview development. Valentine contends that two are not true to Oscar Lewis' (originator of the "culture of poverty" concept) own data and three are much more the result of poverty rather than the cause of poverty. In reference to poverty in general, those on welfare tended to give more weight to the importance of society in causing poverty, while those who worked blamed the poor for their plight. When it came to their own low income, however, the split was racial. Blacks tended to give more influence to society causing poverty, while whites tended to give more power to the individual" (Landon 11-122).

Some notable persons such as Dr. Ben Carson do rise above their humble beginnings. Dr. Carson, a world renowned pediatric neurosurgeon formerly employed at Johns Hopkins University, was born into poverty. Dr. Carson's numerous successes might be used to emphasize the role of individual choices and personal responsibility in breaking poverty cycles. One might even ponder whether Dr. Carson's successes indicate that structural inequities are irrelevant and that only personal choices matter in achieving goals. His life provokes the question about why the 15.89 million Americans living in abject poverty do not rise out of poverty as Carson did (Cannon 204-205). His personal choices, dedication and hard-work are admirable and should be applauded; the crucial role played by his strong and determined mother must not be marginalized. His success does not discount the ubiquitous influence of systemic institutional barriers, however, it does evoke the possibility of successful pursuits when one has a strong positive environment that facilitates making productive life choices.

In *The Educational Contract*, the Washington deals with the relationship between schools, parents, and children. Poor parents often cannot be as supportive as they would

like to be because the language of the academic world does not match their language. This disconnect often makes it impossible for the poor parents to understand the implications and significance of the school's correspondence as it relates to their children particularly in the area of discipline and standardized test scores. The current intended purpose of having scores in the school system is to have a basic definition of what is "normal" or "standard" or "homogenous." "Test scores" act as a mediator to achieving homogeneity. However, given the history of America, to consider homogeneity means we must also consider the larger implications of being colonized by language. This writer quotes Frantz Fanon, the psychiatrist and de-colonization theorist, who stated "to be colonized by language…means above all to assume a culture and to assume the consciousness of the colonizer." To Fanon, who was born in the French colony of Martinique in 1925, to speak the colonizers' language, means that one has been aggressively persuaded into accepting the collective consciousness of the colonizing culture, which identifies Blackness with a deficit in what it means to be human. Likewise, applying the homogenous language of test scores identifies Black students as "unacceptable," and by virtue of connection, Black parents as objectionable, offensive, and intolerable (48-56).

In *The Next Evangelism,* Chan-Rah addresses the disconnect between schools, parents, and children by explaining that it may result from differences in class and culture. The role of violent acculturation through colonization causes dysfunction in these relationships which hurt learning and perpetuate poverty. At the root of this dysfunction lies white privilege. This author quotes the Latino American theologian Virgilio Elizondo who speaks of the ongoing nature of white privilege by stating: "It is the dominant

society that sets the norms and projects the image of success, achievement, acceptability, normalcy, and status. It is the dominant group that sets up the educational process that passes on the traditions and values of the dominant society." The power of privilege is that it can go undetected by those who are oppressed by it and even by those who have it. This writer states:

> It has allowed some white people to create a world in their own image and a system of values that reinforces the power and privilege of those who are white people. At the same time, because of its invisibility, it has helped foster that those who succeed do so because of their superior intelligence, their hard work or their drive, rather than, at least in part, their privilege. White privilege not only deals with an economic benefit, but also speaks to a position of emotional and social power that is oftentimes reserved for white Americans (72-73).

This writer expounds on pervasive effect of white privilege on all persons in society and how it perpetuates poverty and even the ability to identify its influence.

In her book *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, Dr. Joy DeGruy writes about the intergenerational effect of oppression on America.

> Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS) is a condition that exists when a population has experienced multigenerational trauma resulting from centuries of slavery and continues to experience oppression and institutional racism today. A syndrome is a pattern of behaviors that is brought about by specific circumstances. Dr. DeGruy defines vacant esteem as the state of believing oneself to have little or no worth,

exacerbated by the group and societal pronouncement of inferiority. Vacant esteem is the net result of three spheres of influence: 1. Society which influences us through its institutions, laws, policies and media; 2. Our communities in which we live influence us through establishing norms and encouraging conformity to society at large; and 3. Our families influence us through the ways in which we are raised and groomed to take our place, as our parents see it, in our community and society. When these influences all promote a disparaging and limiting identity to which we believe we are confined, vacant esteem can be the result. When so many [Black] youth glamorize thug life and lack of education, when their primary avenues of aspiration are athletics and entertainment, and when males and females, young and old, are sexually irresponsible, we make very real the prejudices of white America and give life to their caricatures of African Americans. One-hundred and eighty years of the Middle Passage, 246 years of slavery, rape and abuse; one hundred years of illusory freedom. Black codes, convict leasing, Jim Crow, all codified by our national institutions. Lynching, medical experimentation, redlining, disenfranchisement, grossly unequal treatment in almost every aspect of our society, brutality at the hands of those charged with protecting and serving…That we are here at all can be seen as a testament to our will-power, spiritual strength and resilience. However, three hundred and eighty-five years of physical, psychological, and spiritual torture have left their mark (121, 125, 135, 107-108).

DeGruy explains that the effect of slavery lingers because of the continuing existence of systemic racism.

In her book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Michelle Alexander reveals that a new caste system has emerged through the Prison Industrial Complex. “Although statistics indicate that young Whites are far more involved in drug activity than Blacks or Browns, the incarceration rates for people of color far exceed that for White youth” (20-57). These disparities create disparities with economic impact by limiting the future legitimate earning abilities of Black and Browns thereby resulting higher poverty rates. Ta-Neishi Coates adds “White America is a syndicate arrayed to protect its exclusive power to dominate and control our bodies. Sometimes this power is direct (lynching), and sometimes it is insidious (redlining)” (*Between the World and Me* 56). DeGruy, Alexander and Coates explain the impact of oppression on Black people which affects the “shalom” (wholeness) of Black people. It is difficult to be whole when one’s life has been fragmented in every aspect. Institutional racism has and continues to play a role in people being able to rise above poverty. While it does not eliminate responsibility, it does help explain the causes of intergenerational poverty. What the researcher finds most troubling are the long-term effects which sometimes appear insurmountable and probably are without both divine intervention and human repentance.

In studying generational poverty with the intent of challenging stereotypes, Dr. Louis Kriesberg asked, “Is it their lifestyle or their circumstances that perpetuates poverty?” He noted that characteristics, conditions, and consequences may constitute a vicious cycle of poverty. “He proposes a situational approach to the study of the poor

because too many variables preclude one approach. Two variables which defy conventional wisdom about generational poverty are: 1. People in the same income group may be too heterogeneous to be evaluated in the same way and 2. Persons in different social ranks have similar values and beliefs but act differently because they confront different circumstances" (*Mothers in Poverty* 2, 24, 54-55).

The writer Barbara Kiviat debunks five myths about America's poor: "1. Poverty doesn't live in the suburbs; 2. Poverty is simply about not having enough income; 3. Getting people out of poor neighborhoods is the answer; 4. Focusing on individuals is the key to poverty alleviation; and 5. Poverty is inevitable. The fact that there is no one archetype of the American poor means it's difficult to create a blanket policy to help them. For some, the answer is a better-paying job. For others, it's detox. For the elderly, for the disabled, for the unemployed, it's good old-fashioned social insurance. Whatever the solution, the ambitions of the people below the line are a crucial part of it" (34-41). The myth that poverty doesn't live in the suburbs might be challenged by another resource which contends that "compared to whites, minority children are more likely to attend schools that are located in the central cities, where a variety of problems are prevalent: less experienced teachers, a majority of students coming from poor families, and elevated rates of crime and drug use. These factors are associated with lower achievement and graduation rates. The differences in educational experience, then, relegate minorities to schools that are inferior and put children attending them at an elevated risk for poverty as adults-since they do not acquire the skills necessary to compete successfully in the labor market" (Seefeldt and Graham 34-35). Poverty exists in

the inner city and in the suburbs and requires individualized approaches because it is a complicated issue that is not limited to economics.

The late Senator Humphrey gave some historical highlights on poverty. He stated that "it took the great depression of 1929 to formulate policy that made public welfare, unemployment compensation, and security for the aged generally acceptable. Senator Humphrey indicated that the size of the poor was beyond even the ability of joint efforts of local, state, and federal government to handle. However, he did suggest stimulating business growth and inspiring collaborative efforts to deal with poverty." His view of the future was that automation and increasingly complex civilization could trap people in poverty (*War on Poverty* 21-34, 188). While Humphrey's language might not perfectly describe the current era, it might be surmised that this post-modern Information Age and cultural inclusivity may be included in his definition of "automation and increasingly complex civilization." Accepting this premise allows us to see the prophetic nature of Senator Humphrey's ominous statement because currently poor people's limited access to, knowledge of, and even distrust of technology exasperates their condition. Furthermore, the increase in both technology and the service industry combined with the decrease in manufactured goods has adversely impacted the middle class by eliminating many higher waged blue-collar jobs. The complexity of this situation lies in the fact that although technology provides great convenience, it also reduces the number of humans needed to produce and people are more actively pursuing service industries.

Stephen Pimpare wrote a historical account of governmental policies and private charitable support which further oppress the poor as a condition for assistance. "Throughout American history, relief policy has been obsessed with the sexual and

reproductive behavior of poor women. In 1966, a mother of two who was a welfare recipient pled guilty to 'being in a room where marijuana was present'. Judge Frank Kearney gave her a choice to be sterilized or serve a six-month jail term. In the 1970s the General Accounting Office revealed that large numbers of Native American women had been sterilized against their will by governmental agencies. Late-twentieth century welfare opponents such as George Gilder and Newt Gingrich's views took a eugenicist and racist form with Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein's *The Bell Curve* (contends that human intelligence is substantially influenced by inherited and environmental factors and indicated the inferiority of non-Whites). Pimpare also discusses poverty, labor, and the prison system by explaining that the Thirteenth Amendment did not abolish slavery: it explicitly retained involuntary servitude as a punishment for being convicted of a crime. In conjunction with the Fifteenth Amendment, which denies felons or ex-felons the right to vote, Black men are still disenfranchised. He contends that throughout much of our history, to be poor was a crime-e.g. debtor's prison" (129-189). This historical account presents policy and practices which tend to perpetuate poverty among social classes (women, Blacks, felons or ex-felons).

Ronald J. Sider proposes that "a just welfare policy would have the following six goals: 1. End poverty not just welfare; 2. Encourage work by allocating support for the working poor and welfare recipients so that work always is economically advantageous; 3. Strengthen stable, two-parent families-and consequently, seek to reduce divorce, single parenthood, and out-of-wedlock births; therefore, seldom if ever should we offer help to single parents that is not also offered to two-parent families; 4. Recognize each person's God-given dignity, and therefore, maximize growth toward long-term, dignified self-

sufficiency and responsibility; 5. Guarantee a generous sufficiency with dignity for all-especially children-who truly cannot provide for themselves; and 6. Strengthen the institutions of civil society that nurture moral renewal" (53, 182).

John Iceland explains that "the hardship that often accompanies poverty plainly has adverse effects on individuals' physical and psychological well-being and poverty often begets poverty, as those who grow up in poor families are more likely to be poor themselves as adults. Second, poverty has broad economic consequences because economies thrive in societies with a vibrant middle class. Third, high levels of poverty have serious social and political consequences because poor people often feel alienated from mainstream society. Poverty also provokes social disorder and crime, and it reduces public confidence in democratic institutions if people do not feel their needs are being addressed by the prevailing system. This phenomenon was evidenced in the ghetto riots of the 1960s, as well as the Los Angeles riots in 1992 both of which reflected the economic, social, and political marginalization of African Americans in U.S. cities" (Introduction). It appears that Iceland has considered both the extent and effect of both individual and institutional actions on poverty. He presents some considerations on how poverty hurts both the poor and others in society. His perspective ostensibly remains mute on the benefits of the privileged few who gain from ignoring or exploiting the poor by amplifying the unrealized gains of the entire society if poverty were responsibly addressed.

Michael B. Katz writes that "there are three profound questions we have seen which frame debates about poverty's origins: 1. How to draw the boundaries between who does not deserve to be helped? 2. How can we provide help without increasing

dependence or creating moral hazard? 3. What are the limits of social responsibility? What do we owe the poor and each other? Poverty is largely talked about and acted on as one of six kinds of problems:

1. Persons: Poverty is the outcome of the failings of individuals;
2. Places: Poverty results from toxic conditions within geographic areas;
3. Resources: Poverty is the absence of money and other key resources;
4. Political economy: Poverty is a by-product of capitalist economies;
5. Power: Poverty is a consequence of political powerlessness;
6. Markets: Poverty reflects the absence of functioning markets or the failure to utilize the potential to improve human lives.

For over two hundred years, the idea that poverty is a problem of persons—that it results from personal, moral, cultural, or biological inadequacies—has dominated the discussions of poverty leading to the enduring idea of the undeserving poor whose behavior and world view are rooted in the "culture of poverty. A concession is made for widows, children, the sick and disabled who cannot help themselves and are therefore considered the deserving poor." (Epilogue). He suggests personalizing our response based on the six cited problems.

Joel Schwartz proposed a 'compassionate conservative' approach to fighting poverty which encourages the practice of commonplace virtues such as diligence, sobriety, thrift, and family responsibility. "He based his ideas on four nineteenth-century moral Reformers—Joseph Tuckerman, Robert M. Hartley, Charles Loring Brace, and Josephine Shaw Lowell—who opposed unconditional doles to the poor, which they feared would pauperize the poor or encourage and confirm their dependency. All four

instead emphasized the need to help the poor by enabling them to help themselves, specifically by inculcating and encouraging the poor to practice the virtues of diligence, sobriety, and thrift." Schwartz noted that a shift in public policy (Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996) signaled a societal move toward requiring increased responsibility and accountability from the poor (xiv-xxii). This approach to helping the poor places high value on initiative, responsibility, frugality and virtue.

Wisconsin Congressman Paul Ryan appears to be another advocate of 'compassionate conservatism'. "He promotes breaking cycles of generational poverty by dismantling the overly generous social welfare system. He argues that the poor are better served by ripping them away from a system that is psychologically and spiritually undermining because generations become dependent and young people are doomed to a lifetime of poverty. This sensibility offers the collateral benefit of requiring less from fellow citizens to 'do good.' By offering fewer programs and toughening eligibility standards, the poor will be required to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps resulting in a win-win for everyone" (Clarke 38). Ryan proposes that this approach empowers the poor and reduces the tax burden of the citizenry.

Contrarily, a scientific experiment done over 40 years ago revealed that more help is needed not less. "Scientists followed two groups of babies from poor families. The first group were given full-time day care up to age 5 where the children were not only fed, but also given a chance to build social skills through interactions, games, and other stimulating activities. The other group was given nothing more than baby formula. Scientists hoped to learn if the first group would show better cognitive development and

educational outcomes over the long run. Differences were noted as early as age 3. By age 30, those in the enhanced-care group were four times as likely to have graduated from college and turned out far healthier with sharply lower rates of high blood pressure and obesity than the children who got nothing. Better fed and educated children become adults who are more capable of poverty-breaking employment and without the personal health issues that would contribute to the nation's largest social burden-health care" (Clarke 38). This experiment contrasts the enormous benefits of a more holistic approach with the disastrous results of merely offering handouts to the poor.

Poverty has many causes and origins and often carries from generation to generation. "Anti-poverty programs have not historically been successful in combating poverty. These programs include the Social Security Act of 1935 which was in part responsible for the creation of Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) which was subsequently replaced by Aid to Families with Dependent Children (ADFC), and later Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF). The initial programs were designed to provide poor widows with the opportunity to stay at home and care for their children. However, many critics assail that most of the funds were used for separated, divorced, or never married women with absent fathers (deadbeat dads). The Family Support Act (FSA) of 1988 was devised to address these concerns by requiring that parents be the primary supporters of their children and that government provide incentives and assistance to help welfare recipients find employment. Since 1971, state Work Incentive (WIN) programs offer welfare-to-work programs to help recipients become self-sufficient" (Harrison Abstract, 4-8). Society's sole dependence on governmental funded programs to address poverty have not insured that those who most deserved help received

it. Furthermore, the effectiveness of governmental funding is questionable since more programs with different names with modified foci have not ameliorated the problem.

"One problem with poverty in North America is the way the issue is culturally understood. This current understanding or dominant ideology of poverty is influenced by politically conservative ideological forces that emphasize poverty as an individual problem (laziness, non-conformity, and the welfare system, moral weaknesses that foster other social problems like teenage pregnancy, crime, and broken homes). This understanding, which neglects poverty as a result of larger structures of society, has been predominant regardless of which political party was in power. One of these ideological forces comes from media representation in the form of television shows not only entertain but also offer ideological lessons about social issues. Five narratives of the working poor have come from [various] television shows: 1. You cannot trust the working poor, 2. The working poor you do not know will kill you, 3. The working poor are absurd, childlike and losers, 4. Single parents signal trouble and single mothers are tough and on drugs, and 5. Immigrants import trouble. Television entertainment is rooted in a middle-class bias which promotes individualism rather than a politically progressive understanding of communalism (not to be confused with the failed communal living of the 1970s or communism). Communalism is based on a nurturing parent model which assumes that the world is basically good, can be made better, and that it is one's responsibility to work toward that. Nurturing has two aspects: *empathy*-feeling and caring how others feel and *responsibility*-taking care of oneself and for others whom we are responsible" (Crandall Abstract, 5-18). Television programming promotes negative perceptions of the poor which influence public policy. The media represents a systemic

institutional barrier which not only distorts how the poor are viewed but discounts the role of other systemic institutional barriers.

In *Ending Poverty: A 20/20 Vision*, the writers contend that "without change, a growing gap between the haves and have-nots will continue to challenge America's national solidarity and stability and will strain an already divisive America. Without access to work, equal opportunity becomes a farce and this condition is passed to subsequent generations" (Maeker and Rogness 44). These writers present a call to action for both individuals and congregations to deal with generational poverty.

Missional and Strategic

Missional and Strategic literature deals with the possibilities of how McCabe Roberts Avenue (MCRA) UMC might address breaking generational poverty in its context. Subsections of Missional and Strategic will be: 1. Spiritual Disciplines (prayer and worship including stewardship), 2. Ministry Initiatives, and 3. Collaborative Efforts. Building a paradigm which is missional and strategic requires: "Sensing Need, Sharing the World, and Embodying Sacred Kingdom. Sensing Need is the initial process in any rhetoric about physical and social needs that happens at the level of creating or awakening personal perception. Our bodies are tuned in through empathic and or emotive connection. Sharing the World means taking some "social action" where our inner perception and prayer moves outside to physically engage with the other. This incarnational giving allows for reciprocity in relating to another equally at the level of creation. Embodying Sacred Kingdom is to bring body and its brokenness into direct relation with that divine urban finale called the Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven" (Holman 15-20).

1. Spiritual Disciplines

The fruitfulness of McCabe Roberts Avenue (MCRA) UMC's ministry to reduce generational poverty in its context and grow God's Kingdom depends, in part, on the congregants' faithfulness in spiritual disciplines. The enormity and complexity of any effort to break generational poverty requires that MCRA not rely on its own strength or understanding, but is led and empowered by the Holy Spirit. "Practicing spiritual disciplines fosters genuine intimacy with God which facilitates hearing more clearly from God. Spiritual growth is the purpose of the Disciplines whose primary requirement is longing after God" (Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* 2,8). The two spiritual disciplines that will be addressed are prayer and worship, including stewardship.

Prayer

For the purposes of this section on spiritual disciplines, prayer is considered in its broadest sense to include prayer, silence, meditation, and fasting which is to say, "talking with God, listening to God, and feasting on God's Word." Prayer is foundational to the life of each believer and the community of faith. The biblical witness makes it clear that Jesus valued prayer for He often left the disciples and the crowd to spend time in prayer with His Father. In fact, Jesus spent time praying and fasting before He began His earthly ministry (Mark 1.12-13 NKJV). Jesus' action models what MCRA should do in its ministry to break the cycle of generational poverty in its context. The Bible records that Jesus spent much of His earthly ministry helping others including the poor by grounding His ministry and life in prayer. The role and power of prayer was so great that Jesus' disciples asked Him to teach them how to pray (Luke 11.1 NKJV). John Wesley, the

Father of Methodism, began the Holy Club whose participants devoted themselves to a methodical spiritual life which included prayer and serving food to the poor.

According to Tisdale, "if congregations and other faith-based communities today are going to join in prophetic witness, that witness will need to arise out of prayer: 1. Prayer to discern the particular witness God would have us make, 2. Prayer about our fears, differences, and struggles, and 3. Prayer lamenting and mourning before God about the brokenness of our world" (Ch. 4). These observations give credence to McCabe Roberts Avenue (MCRA) UMC grounding its efforts in prayer to ignite, empower, and sustain a ministry to help break generational poverty in its context.

"Prayer catapults believers onto the frontier of the spiritual life. Of all the spiritual disciplines, prayer is the most central because it ushers believers into perpetual communion with the Father. It is not prayer in addition to work but prayer simultaneous with work. Believers should precede, enfold, and follow all our work with prayer. Prayer and action become wedded" (Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* 33, 45). Bishop Schnase writes that "John Wesley modeled acts of piety and acts of mercy and taught that both are essential to our life in Christ. Acts of piety had to do with the practices of prayer, worship, receiving the sacraments, fasting, and belonging to a society of Christians holding one another accountable for growing in the knowledge and love of God. Acts of mercy are ministries of compassion, service, and justice that relieve suffering, feed the hungry, visit the imprisoned, and heal the sick." Bishop Schnase states that Atkins, general secretary of the British Methodist Church says "Following Christ involves praying hands and dirty fingernails" (*Remember the Future* 24-25). Prayer empowers and guides the believers' works.

Richard Foster discussed prayer moves: “1. Inward-seeking the transformation we need, 2. Upward-seeking the intimacy we need, and 3. Outward-seeking the ministry we need. The movement inward comes first because without interior transformation the movement up into God’s glory would overwhelm the believer and the movement out into ministry would destroy the believer. As the resistance within the believer is overcome by the operations of faith, hope, and love, the believer begins moving upward into the divine intimacy which empowers the believer for ministry to others. Transformation and intimacy both cry out for ministry. Believers are drawn up into the bosom of God’s love not merely to experience acceptance but also so we can give his love to others” (*Prayer* 5-6, 79-80, 167-168). Bishop Schnase invites congregations to cultivate fruitfulness through prayer and practice in five areas: “1. Radial Hospitality, 2. Passionate Worship, 3. Intentional Faith Development, 4. Risk-Taking Mission and Service, and 5. Extravagant Generosity” (*Cultivating Fruitfulness* 5). Prayer transforms believers.

According to Batterson, “bold prayers honor God, and God honors bold prayers.” “The greatest moments in life are the miraculous moments when human impotence and divine omnipotence intersect-and they intersect when we draw a circle around the impossible situations in our lives and invite God to intervene. Prayers are prophecies. He encourages believers to dream big, pray hard, and think long. Drawing prayer circles starts with discerning what God wants, what God wills to ensure that His sovereign will becomes your sanctified wish. Prayer and praise are both expressions of faith, but praise is a higher dimension of faith. Prayer is asking God to do something, future tense; praise is believing that God has already done it, past tense” (15-40).

Similarly, Kibbey advocates breakthrough prayers which require the pastor to model this type of praying and encourage ministry leaders to do the same. Breakthrough prayers boldly and prophetically call those things which are not as though they were based on discerning God's will for the congregation. Breakthrough prayers become proclamations of God's will on earth as it is in heaven leading to the actualization of the church's vision ("Growing Vibrant Churches").

Suzette Caldwell describes "prayer as the supernatural vehicle that transports believers back and forth between the natural and supernatural in order to extract God's plans for their lives and make them into earthly realities. She advocates praying God's Word as the most reliable way to connect to His will. Caldwell recommends praying "the model prayer" which Jesus taught His disciples. This prayer is comprehensive because it covers: 1. Intimate Praise and Worship ("Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be Your name"), 2. Praying God's Will ("Your Kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"), 3. Praying for Your Needs ("Give us this day our daily bread"), 4. Praying for Forgiveness ("And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors"), 5. Praying for Protection ("And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one"), and 6. Kingdom Praise and Worship" ("For Yours is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen" (33, 85-139). These three approaches (Prayer Circles, Breakthrough Prayers, and Praying God's Word) can strengthen the corporate prayer life of the MCRA church family in a way that ignites, empowers, and sustains the ministry to break the cycles of generational poverty in its immediate context.

Corbett and Fikkert explain that everyone experiences poverty on some level. The universal need for poverty alleviation results from humanity's need for reconciliation

with God, self, others, and the rest of Creation. Humankind's brokenness results in poverty even if it is not material poverty. As believers empower the poor in material poverty alleviation, these efforts must be grounded in a spirituality which recognizes that God is at work in the lives of all people since everyone is poor in some area of life. By praying and glorifying God through this work, these efforts become an act of worship. Believers must always assist others to a deeper intimacy with the Creator as the believer seeks the same in their lives. Those who are not materially poor must join their sisters and brothers by falling on their knees every day and praying, "Lord, be merciful to me and to my friend here, because we are both sinners." As well, all believers must pray "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven, for without You we cannot fix our communities, our nations, our world" (Corbett and Fikkert 74-75). Believers who endeavor to help the materially poor must be humble enough to recognize and pray about their own need for poverty alleviation and center all poverty alleviation on glorifying Creator God.

Marsh and Perkins address the role of silence for believers working with the poor. "Believers don't need to shout the gospel louder than competing messages so much as they need to learn to be quiet in a noisy nation. Quietness and stillness must nourish believers' actions, words, and songs." These authors quoted Bonhoeffer who said "Teaching about Christ begins in silence," "The silence of the church is the silence before the Word." Scripture teaches us, "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46.10) (Marsh and Perkins 97-98). One reason people often can hardly bear to remain silent is that it makes them feel helpless. People are so accustomed to relying upon words to manage and control others. If people are silent, who will take control? God will take control, but

believers will never let Him take control until they trust Him. Silence is intimately related to trust (Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* 100-101). A part of MCRA's corporate prayer motif includes silence and solitude so that the believers can more clearly hear from God.

Just as silence and solitude are dimensions of prayer, so is fasting. Matthew 17.20-21 (NKJV) contains these words which Jesus spoke, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting." John Wesley states "Some have exalted religious fasting beyond all Scripture and reason; and others have utterly disregarded it." "Throughout Scripture fasting refers to abstaining from food for spiritual purposes. In Scripture, the normal means of fasting involves abstaining from all food, solid or liquid, but not from water except for an absolute fast." Regardless of the method, fasting must forever center on God. Therefore, believers, when they fast, are not so much abstaining from food as they are feasting on the word of God. Outwardly, one will be performing the regular duties of the day, but inwardly will be focused on prayer and adoration, song, and worship (Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* 47-57). Based on scripture and supported by tradition, fasting represents a vital spiritual discipline for this transformation project to break the poverty cycle.

Worship

Worship is another spiritual discipline that can edify the MCRA congregants (discipleship) and expand God's Kingdom (evangelism). Richard Foster describes worship as a corporate discipline. He states "to worship is to experience Reality, to touch Life. It is to know, to feel, to experience the resurrected Christ in the midst of the

gathered community" (Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* 158). "For Jesus, all cultic demands must be subservient to human need, whether physical or spiritual, and to interpersonal reconciliation. The most regular occasion for social ministry occurs in public worship. There the worshipping community encounters the transcendent mystery of God, who radically loves the world while suffering with its meek inhabitants, heals human ills by enduring and breaking the chains of oppression, and sets people right through costly acts of justice. A socially healthy liturgy stresses three dimensions: knowledge of God, public prayer, and shared ministry" (Hessel 78-82).

"Churches who value effective stewardship have high expectations that people will respond to the call to discipleship which invites worshippers to world-changing mission" (Christopher 61-70). Churches that are missional have discipleship structures which help believers embrace a bold vision for Christ. These discipleship classes empower believers to understand God's expectation for faithful participation in the Kingdombuilding process.

For MCRA's goal of breaking the cycles of generational poverty, vital worship can: 1. Ignite, empower, and sustain this ministry and 2. Extend the ministry experience beyond mere tangible benefits to more transcendent opportunities to more fully know the Resurrected Christ. While charitable components of this initiative to break cycles of generational poverty may be evident, MCRA's working mission statement of "changing lives and reshaping futures for Jesus Christ" aligns all efforts with the Great Commission. Therefore, growing God's Kingdom is central to this project. Worship is vital to this effort because it is the context most enter or leave the church. Rasmus and Escobedo-Frank help explain why this matters to this project: "The church, for lack of

understanding, has become a fortress, walled-up and caring for its own, alone. . . We have forgotten to engage God, and we have encountered only ourselves. And for that, we are at a crossroads. For that, we are facing death." Two of the ten reasons these authors give for the decline of the UMC include "1. Worship wars and worship that does not connect with culture, 2. Mission to the wealthy and not to the disenfranchised" (Jesus Insurgency Ch. 1). One part of The World Council of Churches' '2015 Millennium Goals' for the Churches Call to Action states: Share liturgies and create new ones which engage with the realities of wealth and poverty (Taylor xiv). Worship must connect with the realities of living in a fallen world to be more meaningful to the poor.

The more "the church" is a local body of believers gathered in the name of Jesus, the greater the chance that it can respond to the movements of the spirit in its immediate context. "Through its worship and instruction, the community prepares members to discern and respond to the spirit in their individual lives and to practice the gifts given by the spirit in the common life. In terms of the church's presence in the world, the spirit-directed community is aware that the living God is not restrained by the tradition of the church and often works outside the boundaries of the community" (Johnson Ch. 4, 6). During the 2014 Texas Annual Conference UMC training event, Brown shared a concept from his book which relates to passionate worship. This concept relates to worship in 3-D: "1. Boutique, 2. Worship by Design, and 3. Technologically Driven. The boutique concept relates to passionate worship in that churches must consider their space and use it creatively for worship and mission. Worship by Design means that churches are very intentional in planning worship and not confined to a routine that fails to connect people to the divine or each other. Christian worship must also focus on relationship building.

Technologically Driven means to optimize technology in creating a worship experience which is sensually spiritual and offers opportunities for people to give electronically to maximize resources for this project" (*Zero to 80* 148-172). Worship must be purposeful, strategic, and missional using the tools of this post-modern era if it's going to attract the new people and grow existing believers.

Effective worship planning must consider the different ways people learn and contour to the different types (Builders, Boomers, and Busters) of people in the church (Hammett and Pierce 97). Effective worship supports the mission of this project. This type of clarity and intentionality in preparing and executing worship can ignite, empower, and sustain this missional project as well as draw the unchurched/unsaved to Jesus Christ.

The pastor's job in worship is to provide careful leadership and teach the gospel with strength and wisdom. The role of preaching is vital as it relates to breaking the cycle of generational poverty. Some congregants consider it important for the preacher to address social injustices such as racism, while others believe that to do so is out of place (Abrums xxxii). The content of sermons should reflect the substance of the church's vision. The teaching should enable people to understand how the vision can become ingrained in their thoughts and activities and to see how vision was modeled on the lives of biblical characters. Some visionary pastors evaluate the utility of a sermon topic according to whether it fits within the vision for ministry of the church and how adequately they can tie that subject to the vision (Barna 136). The pastor's leadership and teaching/preaching can inspire congregants to offer human and financial resources to the transformational ministry of breaking the cycle of generational poverty.

2. Ministry Initiatives

Ehlig and Payne propose four steps for a church to begin a systemic effort to build a congregation involving many people who live in poverty: "1. Collect a wider database about activities based on current needs and the development needed for the future. 2. Have a two-pronged approach to long-term development. Prong 1 is immediate intervention into preventing the development of the fighter/lover identity in males and immediate intervention into enhancing the education of mothers. Prong 2 is promoting an increase in education for young females. 3. Incorporate into the ministry with the poor the notion of mutual respect-there can be no mutual respect when one person is always the giver and the other is always the taker. 4. Identify and establish "mission churches" in poor neighborhoods. Find ministers who enjoy working with the poor and keep them for at least ten years to establish relationships and stability" (*What Every Church Member Should Know about Poverty* 104). This resource proposes that churches perfect data gathering, reorient negative male behavior, develop women for productive careers, and secure long-term focused commitment of churches and clergy.

The author Landon proposes that churches developing authentic relationships with the poor while being cognizant that will require time and vulnerability. Landon provides examples which include socializing with poorer people in the congregation or participating in a community outreach or development project. The writer also suggests visiting minority churches (Landon 123-139, 169-171). MCRA is in a poor neighborhood and through its related IRS 501(c)(3) corporation Growing Community, Inc. (GCI) works with the Boys' and Girls' club. MCRA also tutors with Beaumont Independent School District (BISD). These activities have proven effective at developing relationships with

the poor. However, MCRA realizes that these are mere beginnings to the long-range project of breaking generational poverty.

A church must evaluate itself to make sure it can effectively engage in ministry with the poor. This evaluation may lead to changes needed to create a more conducive environment for this type of ministry. Self-evaluation should cover at least eight areas: 1. Financial, 2. Physical, 3. Mental, 4. Emotional, 5. Spiritual, 6. Support Systems, 7. Relationships/role models, and 8. Knowledge of the hidden rules (Maeker and Rogness 46-49). These are eight of the nine areas presented earlier from Dr. Ruby Payne's work on the type of resources that the poor often lack. To supplement MCRA's self-evaluation, this list could also be used to evaluate the context where MCRA seeks to break the cycle of generational poverty. In November 2015, MCRA began this evaluation through its Re-Imaging project. The goal of this Re-Imaging is to evaluate and re-imagine what it will take to be a more vibrant church in its mission field. Vibrancy includes meeting the needs of those caught in the cycle of generational poverty.

Lupton presents some ideas to enhance the results of the charitable efforts. He contends that much of what churches and other not-for-profits do is not only ineffective but toxic. The write recommends that entities ask themselves what are the most desirable outcomes for our charitable efforts and redesign ministry programs to respond to these result oriented goals. "If churches cared about, for instance, seeing human dignity enhanced, or trusting relationships being formed, or self-sufficiency increasing, then they could employ proven methods known to accomplish these goals. Trust grows with accountability over time. Mutual exchange and legitimate negotiating is energizing (people of every culture love to bargain!). Employment starts people on the path to self-

reliance. The church knows these things and has the capacity to accomplish them. However, the will to change the traditional charity systems-now that is the real challenge" (63). In MCRA's Re-Imaging process, the church considered matters included in this paragraph. MCRA's most obvious and immediate challenge is thinking outside of the box to envision new ways of being and doing which facilitate implementing a more relevant praxis.

According to Simon, there are five things that the church can do: "1. Get rid of our deplorable sense of superiority and condescension toward the poor. 2. Act to alleviate and eliminate poverty by helping people become positive contributors to the world and share with others the benefits of their contributions which requires aggressive political action. 3. Never think that our ultimate goal is to make the poor "un-poor" rather it is to become co-laborers in the gospel. 4. Expose the wonder of God among [humankind]. 5. Learn to celebrate the victory of Christ with one another" (129-132). This list offers the church five considerations for developing meaningful relationships with the poor.

According to Maholmes, "Duflo and other economists argue that it is the absence of hope that keeps people in poverty because they see their efforts as futile. Feelings of futility engender fear, doubt, and inaction, all of which hamper capability, aspirations, and ultimately behavior, and keep individuals mired in their circumstances with no view of how to bring about change." Maholmes focuses on hope as the motivation to overcome adversity: "1. Hope as a motivational process, 2. Hope as a protective mechanism, and 3. Hope as a coping mechanism." (181, 16, 18, 20). The nature of hope is to insure that a person takes initiative and perseveres when faced with the challenges of breaking out of poverty. This writer also contends once hope helps a person achieve basic needs, then

that person has incentive to pursue higher needs as outlined in Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Definition of Key Terms-Chapter 1).

Ministering effectively means identifying felt needs. Felt needs are different from person to person and place to place and in order to do ministry effectively you will need to discover and identify these needs. There are three universal needs: 1. the need to belong, 2. the need to be significant and important, and 3. the need for a reasonable amount of security. The three "*R*'s" of community development are used to meet these needs: 1. Relocation: moving into a needy community either by physically moving back or by moving from the outside in to uplift the people who live there; 2. Reconciliation: the love and forgiveness of the gospel reconcile us to God and to each other across all racial, cultural, social, and economic barriers; and 3. Redistribution: Christ calls us to share with those in need, this will not only mean goods but sharing skills, technology, and educational resources in a way that empowers people to break out of the cycle of poverty (Perkins, *Beyond Charity* 35-37, 183). This approach categorizes individual needs with and tailors its three-prong approach to the needs of each poor person.

3. Collaborative Efforts

Collaborative efforts require a comprehensive integrated approach to breaking generational poverty. Part of this comprehensive approach requires the integration of love, justice, and responsibility. The persons who are agents of love, justice, and responsibility against poverty are citizens and members of faith communities who respond in the roles of "helpers," "activists," or "educators." "Helpers engage in hands-on care with the poor. Activists create pressure on those who have political clout to rearrange social policy. Educators explore the world of ideas believing that ideas shape

behavior. John Wesley, Dorothy Day, and Martin Luther King Jr. saw the interpersonal relationships created by love and justice-oriented social change." They provide a model for the helper, the activist, and the educator in each of us. John Wesley sought to unite knowledge and vital piety by making the gospel and education available to the poor. Dorothy Day found meaning in extending love to her biological family and showing hospitality to destitute persons and providing education through her Catholic newspaper. Dr. King led the civil rights movement by challenging the powers exerted by racial division through a foundation of love (Couture 4-5, 9-11). Collaborative efforts must be comprehensively integrated to be successful.

To properly develop a ministry to break generational poverty in its context, MCRA should understand the community and city. Eight areas are important to understanding a community: "1. Community History, 2. Physical Layout (geographic boundaries; Where are the communities "within" the community?), 3. Neighborhood Assets and Resources, 4. Indicators of Need, 5. Institutional Elements (organizational and agency services and programs, the perception of these entities, and their long-term plans?), 6. Community Dynamics (neighborhood opinion makers and stakeholders, local "political" dynamics?), 7. Religious Institutions 8. Neighborhood Dynamics" (Perkins, Restoring At-Risk Communities: Doing It Together & Doing It Right 221-222). Effective collaborative efforts must be grounded in accurate, current, documented and informal knowledge of the mission field. An understanding of and connection with mission field residents requires knowledge of the people, places, and things that influence their lives.

An example of collaboration exists in the heart of Baltimore's most distressed neighborhoods. "With a vacancy rate of 70 percent and poverty rate twice the city

average, a coalition of local groups and governmental officials designed, developed, and built a new public school that doubles as a community center, library, auditorium and gym, all of which are accessible to area residents. This all-in-one idea acts as the centerpiece of a $1.8 billion plan to renew the blighted area, spur economic development, and give low-income families access to much-needed services. Operated by John Hopkins University in collaboration with Morgan State University and designed by Rob Rogers of Rogers Partners, the 130,000-square-foot space is open and bright, with windows that look out to the surrounding neighborhood" (Skarda 1-2). This collaboration between can improve blighted areas and increase the quality of life for its residents.

Neighborhood Centers, a Houston nonprofit, works with the poor by seeking input from them. Their collaboration involves soliciting input from the poor on how to best help them. This approach works well in Houston, where Neighborhood Centers has enabled hundreds of thousands of poor residents, many of them immigrants, to move up the ladder of economic and educational opportunity each year. Its president and chief executive officer for the past two decades Angela Blanchard states "The people are the asset, the source of potential solutions, not the problem." Instead of telling poor neighborhoods what's wrong with them, the organization takes a bottom-up approach. "We go where we're invited and do what we're asked to do." "Neighborhood Centers runs more than 70 sites, scattered across the city and in pockets of poverty in the surrounding suburbs with an annual budget of $270 million and serves more than half a million people. In 2014, Neighborhood Centers' career offices secured jobs for 110,000 people. Collaborating with local community colleges, the nonprofit trained 5,600 for careers in welding and pipe-fitting, skills needed to work at the Port of Houston, in

classes that run past midnight to meet the demand. Classes teach Latina stay-at-home moms how to turn their talents as cake makers into small businesses by advertising on Facebook and securing bulk purchases from grocery stores. Other women learn how to run a thrift store, giving them an entrée into retailing" (Kirp 2-3). This approach accentuates the role of community input to design programs that match the needs.

Community Coalition creates partnerships that become a "Bridge of Hope" for people moving from dependency to self-sufficiency. Its values are relationships, partnerships, empowerment, and transformation. "The priorities are: 1. Children and Youth Initiatives, 2. Leadership Development, 3. Personal Development, 4. Professional Development, and 5. Transitional Housing" (Boaz 1). MCRA works with this coalition through Campus Compassion Adopt-a-School Initiative and the researcher serves on the advisory board.

In the impoverished East Baltimore Midway neighborhood, there is a community garden called Boone St. Farm which operates on two vacant plots. "It serves as an urban farm that grows and provides fresh produce for its neighbors and a community garden where residents can learn about growing their own food. It produces affordable produce and offers gardening workshops and nutrition classes for students at the nearby public school. Boone St. Farm plans to include local cleanup initiatives and other projects aimed at making the farm an essential part of the neighborhood" (Templin). Growing Community, Inc. (an IRS 501(c)(3) corporation borne out of McCabe Roberts Avenue UMC) operates a community garden and could benefit from Boone St. Farm's experiences.

A collaboration exists between McCabe Roberts Avenue (MCRA) UMC/Growing Community, Inc. (GCI) and Inspire, Encourage, and Achieve (IEA). IEA stimulates hope and changes lives of SE Texas Youth who are on probation or otherwise at risk of delinquency. IEA also helps parents by providing a supportive network of resources that enables them to strengthen their parenting skills and develop stronger support systems (IEA). IEA partners with Children's Defense Fund's Freedom School by using their curriculum designed to help lift children out of poverty, protect them from abuse and neglect and ensure their access to health care, quality education and a moral and spiritual foundation (Children's Defense Fund). MCRA/GCI provides spiritual and emotional guidance for the youth and staff while providing physical space for this program.

Another example of an effective program is Collaborative for Children which works with parents, educators, and local leaders to make sure children have the learning opportunities they need to succeed. The scientific evidence is abundantly clear that an investment in young children through engaged parenting and high quality early education programs makes a lifelong difference in school outcomes and workforce readiness. Steps to achieve the vision: 1. Parents should have access to a range of resources to become the best parents they can be for their growing children; 2. Collaborative for Children's programs shall maintain high quality standards and be accessible to working families; and 3. Pre-K Programs must be of high quality and accessible. Collaborative for Children works alongside Texas agencies to: 1. Invest in-school readiness for all children; 2. Raise state standards for regulated child care programs; 3. Support well trained early childhood educators; 4. Make quality child care available for all; and 5. Fund full school-day public pre-kindergarten for children at risk (Collaborative for Children).

God's people at the front lines among America's poor are finding refreshment and discovering that they are not alone through the Christian Community Development Association (CCDA). CCDA is a church-based movement of over 175 ministries and churches active among the poor in 75 cities and 30 states. Its mission is to develop a strong fellowship of those involved in Christian community development. CCDA's membership are united in their belief that people empowered by God are the most effective solution for the spiritual and economic development needs of the poor (Perkins, *Restoring At-Risk Communities* 221-222).

Research Design Literature

In 'The Praxis Model' or 'action-reflection-action', "the D Min student functions as a resident contextual theologian who is initiating a ministry intervention within a particular context in order to address critically a discrete problem so that the community will continue its journey of becoming like Christ for the sake of the world. The D Min student in the [dissertation] process, highlights the student's functioning as a resident practical theologian who practices: 1. theology as a communal activity-faith relating to others, 2. theology as a formative activity-faith shaping identity, 3. theology as a critical activity-faith seeking understanding in practice, and 4. theology as a public activity-faith expressing itself in the marketplace" (Sensing xix).

Ethical considerations are paramount and these research ethics pertain to the interaction between researchers and participants. Four core ethical principles guide research practices: "1. non-malfeasance, 2. beneficence, 3. autonomy (self-determination), and 4. justice." These principles are designed to ensure that participants are not harmed physically, emotionally, financially or in any other way. The IRB

Application required the researcher to complete Human Subject Research Training which provided detailed instruction on how to apply these principles. The researcher received a certificate of completion related to this instruction which guided researcher's project plans and implementation. Further, a consent form was designed for each participant which generally followed this prescribed format: 1. Introduction, 2. Purpose, 3. Procedure, 4. Time required, 5. Voluntary participation, 6. Risks, 7. Benefits, 8. Confidentiality/Anonymity, 9. Sharing the results, 10. Publication, and 11. Before you sign, particularly related to electronically audiotaped interviews (Sensing 235-236).

The qualitative lens was chosen for this project on helping to break generational poverty through collaborative efforts because of these five characteristics: "1. the goal of eliciting understanding and meaning, 2. the researcher as primary instrument of data collection and analysis 3. the use of fieldwork, 4. an inductive orientation to analysis, and 5. findings that are richly descriptive. Qualitative research is grounded in the social world of experience and seeks to make sense of lived experience" (Sensing 57). The type of qualitative research was Pre-Intervention because researcher desired to: 1. describe or explain the phenomenon thoroughly, 2. evaluate/analyze it, 3. identify what is contributing to the problem, and 4. propose some specific next steps which might serve as a paradigm for other congregations (Asbury Theological Seminary D Min Office 2). The researcher used Semi-Structured interviews and a Focus Group to answer the three research questions. The researcher chose to ask open-ended and informal questions which were primarily: "1. Grand Tour, 2. Guided Tour, 3. Descriptive, 4. Hypothetical, 5. Ideal Position, 6. Knowledge, 7. Behavior, 8. Opinion, 9. Sensory, and 10. Background" (Sensing 86-88). This list does not cover all of the type of questions listed in the book but

represent the researcher's focus in formulating the questions. "Narratives and stories were a part of the participants' responses and used to identify themes" (Coffey and Atkinson 56).

"The purpose of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience in this case specifically related to ministry with the generationally poor. Interviewing provides access to the context of people's behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior. The researcher chose interviewing as a key way to access information because it is most consistent with people's ability to make meaning through language" (Seidmand 9-10). During the interviews, the researcher initiated the open-ended questions but allowed the participants' responses to dictate the follow up using this guideline: "1. ask questions when you do not understand, 2. ask to hear more about a subject, and 3. explore, don't probe. The researcher listened more, talked less, and asked real questions using this approach. Additional steps were taken to ensure quality responses: 1. avoided leading questions, 2. asked open-ended questions, and 3. followed up without interrupting" (Seidmand 14). With prior written consent, the researcher electronically taped interviews and procured professional transcribing services to produce hard copies of the interviews (Seidmand 78-85).

Purposive samples were used for both the Semi-Structured Interviews and Focus Group. Purposive samples select people who have awareness of the situation and meet the criteria and attributes that are essential to the research. Particular care was taken to ensure that the quality of respondent participants was substantial enough to provide depth and diversity in the research (Sensing 83-86).

Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the complicated mass of qualitative data that the researcher generates during the research process. Thick description made explicit the fullness of the researcher's understanding of the implied range of meaning of the social settings, actions, or words by using the data to capture patterns, categories, or themes. Also, the researcher looked for slippage which asked, "What is not congruent in the data?" seeking disconfirmation of the findings. Finally, the researcher identified what was left unsaid that needs to be examined; this is called silences (Sensing 194-202).

Summary of Literature

The views in the *Biblical and Theological* section delineates God's expectation of how the covenant people have and must respond to the needs of the poor. The underlying theme is that God created this world so that each person would at least have enough because the God of life desires all to fully enjoy life. This love ethic calls the faithful to make sure that the poor have an opportunity for an enriched life. Jesus' comment "the poor you will have with you always" was an indictment of the people of faith's failure to obey the command in Deuteronomy 15 to help the poor. This section also identifies both causes and effects of generational poverty; a faithful response requires both those who have and the poor to participate in helping to break the cycle of generational poverty.

The various views in the *Theoretical and Historical Context* section could be summated into two competing voices. One voice contends that generational poverty results from individuals functioning from an anti-societal worldview which leads to negative self-destructive behaviors which are passed on generationally. This voice promotes that a change in perspective and behavior could curtail the poverty cycle.

This change could occur by: 1. Reducing the amount of public assistance which tends to foster dependency as well as creates an excessive burden on taxpayers; 2. Creating incentives to work by making it harder to get assistance and shortening the length and amount of support thereby reducing the social service rolls; 3. Instituting moral behavior restrictions and guidelines which reduce the possibility of additional pregnancies or the presence of an adult male in the household. Supporters often view this as "compassionate conservatism" and believe that it is a win-win solution to reducing generational poverty. Exponents consider it a "deficit perspective" which locates the cause of poverty on the poor without considering systemic institutional issues such as classism or its subcategories of racism, sexism, and ageism. These exponents consider the systemic institutional issues as motivated by greed.

The other voice (identified in the prior paragraph as exponents) contend that the cause of generational poverty primarily lies in systemic institutional issues such as classism and its subcategories of racism, sexism, and ageism. This voice does not deny the existence of negative self-destructive behavior of some poor people but perceives these behaviors as the *effect* rather than the *cause* of poverty. The proponents of this view believe that the culture of poverty promotes stereotypes by ignoring the majority of hard working honest law-abiding poor. The culture of poverty approach also lowers educational expectations of poor students because teachers expect low achievements and poor students respond accordingly. Changes to ameliorate poverty could occur by: 1. Addressing and confronting the underlying systemic institutional issues which place greed before people and discount the benefit of strengthening the middle class;

2. Increase and redistribute funding to provide better early educational opportunities and quality health care for poor children and indoctrinate teachers to be more intentionally affirming and supportive of the poor; 3. Tailor strategies and approaches by equipping institutions to better respond to the heterogeneous nature of poverty and help poor people become more self-sufficient. Supporters often view themselves as progressive and believe that their approach will strengthen the nation and reduce poverty. Detractors often pejoratively label them as “bleeding heart liberals” suggesting that their view lacks a moral foundation and will both corrupt the poor and further bankrupt the nation.

The *Missional and Strategic* section deals with how McCabe Roberts Avenue (MCRA) UMC has been and can be more faithful in three areas: 1. Spiritual Disciplines (prayer, worship including stewardship), 2. Ministry Initiatives, and 3. Collaborative Efforts. Spiritual Disciplines relates to how the MCRA congregants grow spiritually and advance the Kingdom of God. Ministry Initiatives relate to perspectives on how to develop ministry to help break the cycle of generational poverty. Collaborative Efforts relate to ideas on collaboration and collaborative potential for MCRA.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter describes the research methodology for this project on breaking the cycle of generational poverty. Three research questions were used to explore the ministry opportunities that McCabe Roberts Avenue (MCRA) United Methodist Church (UMC) has used and might use to help break the cycle of generational poverty through collaborative efforts. The enormity of the challenge to break the cycle of generational poverty necessitated examining collaborative efforts as a vehicle to yield greater results. The ministry context covered the greater Beaumont, Texas area with a particular emphasis on the contiguous area where MCRA UMC is located. Selection criteria used for this qualitative research project is explained including a description of the participants. Ethical considerations along with the procedure for collecting and analyzing evidence were described. Researcher explained the steps taken to ensure that the tools for research aligned with the purpose and research questions.

Nature and Purpose of the Project

The Beaumont, Texas area has a large number of individuals and families who experience generational poverty. A significant number of persons seem unable to or perhaps uninspired to break the cycle which is passed on generationally. McCabe Roberts Avenue (MCRA) UMC and other entities either have not done enough or done the right things to help break this cycle of poverty. The purpose of this study was to investigate what ministries MCRA might develop and how the church might collaborate with local

ministry partners to help break the cycle of generational poverty in the Beaumont, Texas area.

Research Questions

RQ #1. What ministries is MCRA engaged in to help break the cycle of generational poverty in the Beaumont, Texas area?

The researcher developed five sub questions designed to obtain information on this research question. Open-ended questions were developed and used to obtain responses on MCRA's ministry with the generationally poor. These questions were designed to obtain information about: 1. the role of the particular ministry area to help break the cycle of generational poverty, 2. role of spiritual disciplines such as prayer, worship including stewardship to support this effort to help break the cycle of generational poverty, 3. challenges posed by institutional barriers in helping to break generational poverty, 4. challenges posed by individual/peer/familial detrimental behavior, and 5. successes, improvements, and abandoned efforts.

RQ #2 What steps can MCRA take to identify or develop a life transforming ministry which helps to break the cycle of generational poverty in the Beaumont, Texas area?

The researcher developed five sub questions designed to obtain information on this research question. These questions were designed to obtain information through interviews. Interview were designed to obtain responses about: 1. motivation to develop and implement this ministry (historical background), 2. challenges posed by both institutional systemic barriers (causes) and self-destructive behavior of the poor (effects), 3. role of discipleship and spiritual formation for both ministry workers and the

generationally poor, 4. mechanics of identifying, developing, and securing contributions/grants/support for this ministry and 5. hypothetical question about ministry design enhancement(s).

RQ #3 How can MCRA most effectively collaborate with local entities to help break the cycle of generational poverty?

The researcher developed five sub questions designed to obtain information to answer this research question. These questions were designed to obtain information through interviews. Interview questions sought responses about: 1. motivation to develop and implement this ministry (historical background, 2. specifics on how agency successfully collaborates with others, 3. future plans on collaborative efforts, 4. requirements to collaborate with agency and what should be avoided, and 5. available collaboration opportunities are available for collaboration.

Ministry Context(s)

According to the 2014 U.S. Census Bureau statistics, Beaumont, Texas' poverty rates of 23.2% exceed the national poverty rates of 14.8%, and Beaumont's median income was $39,191 compared to the national median income of $53,482 with a 2010-2014 per capita income for Beaumont of $23,925 and $28,555 nationally (U.S. Department of Commerce).

Poverty is worse in the South and for African Americans and Hispanics, a phenomenon which describes the research area. The researcher's area located in Texas' 14th District has a poverty rate that is the 263th worst of America's 436 districts. Child poverty is the 286th worst, and the poverty rate for working women is the 279th worst (Pimpare, TalkPoverty.org: Real People, Real Places, Real Solutions).

Although McCabe Robert Avenue's (MCRA) mission field is primarily Black, Hispanic and poor to lower middle class, the congregants are predominantly Black (88%) and White (12%) and middle class with approximately half of the congregants residing in the church's mission field. In 1995, McCabe (a predominantly Black UM congregation) and Roberts Avenue (a predominantly White congregation) merged and occupied the space previously used by Roberts Avenue. Over the years, the declining congregation aged, and the massive old buildings require constant repair. However, the church has begun a Re-Imaging project designed to listen more purposefully to what God is doing in this season of the church's life. This listening occurs through intentional prayer, planning, preparation, and participating with the Holy Spirit to revitalize God's church. The proud members are very committed to this Re-Imaging because they want their church to thrive not just survive and they want to leave a legacy so that future generations can further expand God's Kingdom.

The UMC has a pastoral itineracy system and a new Episcopal leader began in July 2016. The researcher will most likely not move before the completion of this project.

Participants

Criteria for Selection

This research used the purposive sampling method because the integrity of the results depended on using those whose awareness of and participation in breaking the cycle of generational poverty provided "information-rich" responses. The researcher chose persons who have a vested interest in breaking the cycle of generational poverty, generally knowledgeable about it, fit the relevant demographics of this project, and have

a reputation for helping the poor. (Sensing 83-86). The researcher chose the participants (described in the next section) because they fit the aforementioned criteria.

Description of Participants

On the signed consent forms, all participants gave permission to use their real names but to optimize confidentiality, the researcher chose to use pseudonyms.

Research Question # 1 Focus Group

For Research Question # 1, the researcher presented open-ended questions to a focus group comprised of four key leaders of McCabe Roberts Avenue (MCRA) UMC. A brief description of each leader is presented here:

- Lorraine: Black, middle-aged female (some college) employed full-time with MCRA manages daily matters related to the poor including but not limited to direct service provisions and referrals to partnering agencies.
- Samuel: Black, middle-aged (some college) male active with Growing Community, Inc. (GCI)-MCRA's in-house community outreach provider and life-time active member of MCRA who provides significant human and financial resource capital. Actively participates in weekly Prayer Power designed to empower ministry efforts.
- Martha: Black, middle-aged female (some college) Executive Director of GCI which manages community garden, provides seminars on healthy nutrition, garden development and management, life and career visioning, and help for at-risk youth. Martha (researcher's spouse) also coordinates weekly Prayer Power designed to empower ministry efforts. Trained in pastoral care currently employed as Hospice Chaplain. She also participates in many volunteer

activities including Beaumont's Convention Visitors' Bureau board, Planning and Zoning Commission. Martha's involvement with GCI and MCRA has resulted in collaborative efforts with Boys' and Girls' Haven, Boys' and Girls Club, Salvation Army and others. Martha has extensive experience helping people get and remain sober and has been sober herself for over 30 years. These activities provide a venue to directly or indirectly help break the cycle of poverty.

- Elizabeth, White, middle-aged female who represents church with Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) for children and MCRA's Medicare consulting to help persons understand benefits optimization. Actively participates in weekly Prayer Power designed to empower ministry efforts.

Research Question # 2 Interviewees

For research question #2, the researcher interviewed two senior pastors and separately interviewed their support staff person. One congregation is located in Houston, Texas, and the other is located in Beaumont, Texas.

St. John's Downtown (UMC)

Elisha (the interviewee), co-pastors St. John's with his wife Anna. He has pastored this church for 26 years. In 1992, he was placed at this dying church with only 9 members. In order to reach their offices, he and his wife had to step over poor people who slept on the church's steps. This inspired them to develop a thriving ministry with the poor which helped move people from dependency to self-sufficiency while rapidly growing the church because people were drawn to help the poor. Elisha is a 59-year old Black married male and now an empty nester. He is a licensed Local Pastor with a

Bachelor of Arts degree working on a D Min degree at United Theological Seminary (August 2016).

Tiffany, is the Houston church's Chief Financial Officer (effective 2013) managing a $7 million annual budget. However, she continues to handle Executive Pastor responsibilities of this church (2005-2013). She has been the Executive Director (2000-2005) at the Bread of Life (homeless ministry) and now provides oversight for this ministry. In 1997, she began and headed the church's academy, a school for kids (9 weeks to 1st grade) infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. She has extensive administrative and operational experience working with the poor. Tiffany is a 58-year old Black married female, an empty nester and a church member since 1991.

Harvest for Lost Souls

Kevin (the interviewee) co-pastors with his wife Kim. Pastors Kevin and Kim co-founded this church which began as a "house church." Kevin is a 55-year old Black married male with two early teenaged (13, 11) children. He holds two doctoral degrees: Doctor of Ministry and Doctor of Theology (Counselling). His ministry focus is on life transformation of hurting people which has resulted in some significant work with the poor. He is an ordained minister. Pastor Kevin's ministry reaches the community where McCabe Roberts Avenue UMC is located and has been very successful at helping people to become self-sufficient.

Minister Pamela actively works in this ministry to help the poor in the community. She is a Black 47-year old female who works with ministry areas designed to help persons escape poverty related cycles particularly related to drug addiction recovery,

mental health treatment, generational curses, and partnering with entities. Minister Pamela has belonged to this church for over 7 years and is directly mentored by Kevin.

Research Question # 3 Interviewees

For Research Question # 3, the researcher separately interviewed two persons from one agency and four persons (three simultaneously) from another entity totaling six participants. The two entities are located in Beaumont, Texas.

Community Coalition (IRS 501 (c)(3) Not-for-Profit Corporation)

Celine is the Co-Director, but is considered the top manager, of this newly formed entity, and she focuses on community engagement. This entity grew out of her home church. This entity planned for three years and had its first formal meeting one and a half years later. It became an IRS 501 (c)(3) Corporation in September 2015. Celine has been very active in the Greater Beaumont area. Celine has been involved in Rev. John Perkins' Christian Community Development Association (CCDA), a well-established national organization which provides education and technical expertise for those interested in helping others through collaborative efforts. Celine is a 51-year old married White female with two adult sons and now a foster child. She worked as a speech therapist in the Head Start program of Beaumont Independent School District (BISD) focusing on mathematics and reading education. She holds a Bachelor of Arts teaching degree with a minor in Psychology. She did not grow up in a Christian home but started attending church at 15. After completing a Christian College, she understood grace and met Jesus Christ at 21. During post-partum depression, she discovered Jesus Christ as her strength.

Lisa is a Co-Director who functions as the Project Director. Lisa has a Bachelor of Science degree in Human Services Management. She is a 45-year old married Black

woman; her husband is an Associate Minister at Mount Gilead Missionary Baptist Church. Lisa has one child at home and has two other adult children. Earlier in life, she personally experienced poverty and its related great difficulties. She lived through two significant unhealthy relationships until she met her husband of 20 years. She actively works with women to escape cycles of poverty by empowering them socially, emotionally, spiritually, and professionally.

Food Bank of Southeast Texas

Bonnie is Agency Relationship Specialist-Partner responsible for collaborating with various entities to meet the needs of the poor. Bonnie has worked at the Food Bank for two years. Bonnie has a dual degree in Elementary Education/Special Education and a Diaconal Ministry degree from Southern Methodist University (SMU). Bonnie also partially completed a Masters' degree in Reading and Mathematics. She is a married 56-year old Caucasian female and mother of two daughters. Over the years, she has hosted 50 exchange children in her home and raised 30 foster children. She states that a focus in her home growing up was to reach out to help "strangers".

Another interview was conducted with three persons because the initial person, Stacy, had recently left the agency at the time of the interview. The Executive Director (Ed) suggested that he, Stacy (outgoing staff), and Thelma (recent hire) participate in the interview to ensure depth of coverage.

- Executive Director Ed is a 51-year old White male employed for four years. Ed holds Bachelors of Arts in Business Administration and a Masters of Divinity degree.

- Thelma is Children's Program Coordinator Representative for the School Tools and Back Pack program (4 weeks). Thelma collaborates with schools and other entities to make educational supplies available to children from poor families. Thelma is a nearly 60-year old college educated Black female.
- Stacy formerly held the position of Children's Program Coordinator Representative for the School Tools and Back Pack program. She accepted this assignment because of her interest in helping ensure that poor children have adequate supplies to facilitate learning. Stacy has a Bachelor of Science degree in Education and worked for the Food Bank for two years. Stacy retired from Beaumont Independent School District (BISD). Stacy is a 63-year old married White female.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to this research being approved by the Asbury Theological Seminary Dissertation Coach and pursuant to the Internal Review Board (IRB) instructions, the researcher requested and received signed permission letters to conduct the research at the various locations. After the dissertation coach and IRB approval but before commencing the focus group and semi-structured interviews, the researcher secured signed consent forms (refer to sample in Appendix) 1). These consent forms included: 1. Introduction, 2. Purpose, 3. Procedure, 4. Time required, 5. Voluntary participation and right to withdraw at any time, 6. Declaration of no known risks, 7. Benefits, 8. Confidentiality, 9. Statement on how results will be shared, 10. Publication, and 11. Before you sign statement about what they agreed to (Sensing 235-236). This consent agreement explicitly stated that no harm will come to the participants as a result of their support of

this project. Data will be stored in the researcher's locked office and kept hidden in file cabinet. Key access is limited to the researcher, custodian, and one church officer; file cabinet access is limited to the researcher.

Instrumentation

The researcher used open-ended questions requiring verbal responses. These open-ended questions were presented to a focus group and through semi-structured interviews. For Research Question #1, the researcher presented five open-ended questions to a focus group. For Research Questions #2 and #3, the researcher presented open-ended five questions for all of the semi-structured interviews.

Expert Review (optional)

The researcher requested three unrelated persons to review the supporting questions related to each of the three research questions. The persons were asked to provide feedback about the questions. Comments related to clarity, conciseness, syntax and other matters were used to edit the initial proposed questions. These three persons were not participants in the study but were used to improve the initial proposed supporting questions which were designed to answer the three big research questions.

Reliability & Validity of Project Design

The researcher believes that there is a high likelihood that someone else could repeat this research and discover many of the same things. Possible differences could emerge which reflect the triangulation related biases of the participants, outsider's, and researcher. However, these differences should not be so skewed as to invalidate the general findings of this project.

Triangulation defined as cross-checking the existence of certain phenomena and the veracity of gathering data from a number of informants and a number of sources and subsequently comparing and contrasting one account with another in order to produce as full and balanced a study as possible. This occurred in various principal ways: 1. two types of methods were used to obtain data which were semi-structured interviews and a focus group (methodological triangulation); 2. at least two representatives participated from the entities, 3. three churches' representatives were interviewed and two not-for-profit locale entities participated. The researcher kept open the possibility of checking program documents and written evidence to corroborate participants' responses, but this need did not arise during the research (data triangulation). This approach offered the researcher the opportunity to access through triangulation (Sensing 72-74).

The researcher field tested the questionnaires by obtaining expert reviews from persons not involved in the study. The expert reviews were done for the focus group (RQ # 1) and the two semi-structured interview questions (RQ # 2 and 3) and the open-ended questionnaire (RQ # 2). Comments were used to modify both the big research questions and the supporting questions designed to answer the big research questions.

The Asbury Theological Seminary's assigned Coach/Mentor Dr. Anne Gatobu also previewed the research and provided input to increase the reliability of the analyzed data. The researcher's clarifying assumptions, worldview, theoretical orientation, Wesleyan theological influences (Ecclesial Significance) were reported as researcher's biases (Sensing 41, 228). The researcher also considered the inherent value and liability of researcher as primary interviewer and took special care to ask open-ended questions,

prompt without probing, limit his own interaction, and avoided reinforcing participant's response (Seidmand 114-115).

Data Collection

The researcher chose qualitative research rather than quantitative. The five common characteristics of qualitative research are:

1. the goal of eliciting understanding and meaning
2. the researcher as primary instrument of data collection and analysis
3. the use of fieldwork
4. an inductive orientation to analysis
5. findings that are richly descriptive (Sensing 57).

Qualitative research is grounded in the social world of experience and seeks to make sense of lived experience. Qualitative research produces culturally specific and contextually rich data critical for the design, evaluation, and ongoing health of institutions like churches (Sensing 57).

The researcher chose purposive sampling to support this qualitative project. Purposive samples select people who have awareness of the situation and meet the criteria and attributes essential to this research (Sensing 83). This qualitative research design is pre-intervention because the researcher sought to 1. thoroughly describe or explain breaking generational poverty through collaborative efforts, 2. evaluate/analyze it, 3. identify what is contributing to the problem, and 4. propose some specific next steps and/or design a solution (Asbury Theological Seminary D Min Office 2).

RQ #1 What ministries is McCabe Roberts Avenue (MCRA) UMC engaged in to help break the cycle of generational poverty in the Beaumont, Texas area?

To answer this question, the researcher created open-ended questions that were answered in a focus group. This focus group was comprised of four key MCRA Leaders described in another subsection entitled Description of Participants. These persons fit the criterion of purposive sampling and were scheduled and confirmed for a confidential meeting. The meeting was held in a closed room in the church's fellowship hall on a no activity day to ensure that the recorded session would not be compromised by interruption or noise interference. After a brief reiteration of the purpose, the researcher presented the consent form, explained it and secured signatures and authorization to use real names if needed. These consent forms (refer to Appendix) 1) included:
1. Introduction, 2. Purpose, 3. Procedure, 4. Time required, 5. Voluntary participation and right to withdraw at any time, 6. Declaration of no known risks, 7. Benefits,
8. Confidentiality/Anonymity, 9. Statement on how results will be shared,
10. Publication, and 11. Before you sign statement about the nature of their agreement as well as affirming their knowledge of a digital recording being used for this session (Sensing 235-236). As the recorder ran, the researcher asked each question and allowed them to respond. The researcher probed further when more clarification appeared needed. The researcher took notes of key comments or notable non-verbal behavior. The researcher frequently checked the digital recorder to ensure that it was working properly.

RQ #2 What steps can McCabe Roberts Avenue (MCRA) UMC take to identify or develop a life transforming ministry which helps to break the cycle of poverty in the Beaumont, Texas area?

To answer this question, the researcher conducted a semi-structured interview with two pastors and a key staff leader. These pastors and staff satisfied the purposive

sampling criteria of being knowledgeable about poverty and having the ability to convey their experience in a manner to further this research on poverty (Sensing 83). The researcher perceived that it would strengthen the sampling method by not limiting the interviews to the pastor but also include a staff person to provide greater depth to the research responses. On the same day and subsequent to each other, the researcher separately conducted these interviews: one with the pastor and another with the staff person. The interviewer recognized that the interviewee's responses could possibly be affected by their interactions. Therefore, the interviewer attempted to be flexible, adaptable, tactful, and skillful to avoid undue influence on the responses (Seidmand 114-115). The semi-structured interview allowed for a guided flexibility which facilitated the researcher's ability to probe deeper when responses stimulated further inquiry. The pastor and staff shared their experiences of growing a ministry to help break the cycle of generational poverty in their context. With their prior written consent, the researcher digitally recorded the interviewee's responses and manually wrote notes to capture the essence of the session. The recorded interview was later transcribed and both the transcription and notes were used to formulate findings. The researcher constructed open-ended questions to obtain needed information to enhance the research. These questions were designed to glean an understanding of: 1. motivation for starting or continuing this ministry to help break the cycle of generational poverty, 2. approaches to address systemic institutional barriers and individual destructive behavioral challenges, 3. role of discipleship and spiritual formation, 4. methods and sources of internal and external financial support, and 5. envisioning what could enhance the ministry.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted at the ministry locations. One location was in Downtown Houston where the Pastors Elisha (interviewee) and Anna have led this congregation for nearly three decades in a very vibrant ministry with the poor. Many formerly poor persons have moved from dependency to self-sufficiency through this United Methodist Church's (UMC) ministry. While this type of ministry is not denominational focused or restricted, the researcher believed it significant to share the experiences that occurred through another UMC which evidences that it can also happen through MCRA UMC or similar congregations. It is also germane to note when St. John's began its ministry to the poor when it was a small congregation just like MCRA UMC. The other research location is in the same neighborhood that McCabe Roberts Avenue UMC ministers because the researcher hoped that the locale might reveal some indigenous particularities of MCRA's mission field. This church is led by Pastors Kevin (interviewee) and Kim. Before conducting the semi-Structured interviews, the researcher requested and obtained a signed consent agreement which included: 1. Introduction, 2. Purpose, 3. Procedure, 4. Time required, 5. Voluntary participation and right to withdraw at any time, 6. Declaration of no known risks, 7. Benefits, 8. Confidentiality/Anonymity, 9. Statement on how results will be shared, 10. Publication, and 11. Before you sign statement about what they agreed to including the digitally recorded portion of the interview (Sensing 235-236).

RQ #3 How can McCabe Roberts Avenue (MCRA) UMC most effectively collaborate with local entities to help break the cycle of generational poverty?

To answer this question, the researcher conducted a semi-structured interview with representatives from two entities with missional emphasis on breaking the cycle of poverty through collaborative efforts in Beaumont, Texas. The entities varied in size, duration, and missional emphasis. This research used the purposive sampling method because the integrity of the results depended on using those whose conscientious awareness of poverty was evidenced by their involvement in resolving this issue. Their vested interest in breaking the cycle of generational poverty, experiential knowledge about it, and relevant demographics were bases for choosing these persons in these entities (Sensing 83). The researcher's interviews were conducted at their offices. At one agency, the researcher separately interviewed two managers. At the older more established agency, the researcher interviewed the Executive Director with the out-going manager and her recent replacement and separately interviewed another manager. Since the out-going manager had been gone for about three weeks and the new one had only been working for the same amount of time, the Executive Director offered to participate and the depth of his experience enhanced this research. With their prior written consent, during the interview the researcher digitally recorded the interviewee's responses and took notes. The recorded interview was later transcribed and both the transcription and notes were used to formulate findings. The semi-structured interview allowed for a guided flexibility which facilitated the researcher's ability to probe deeper when responses stimulated further inquiry. The researcher constructed particular open-ended questions to obtain needed information needed to answer the research question. These questions were designed to glean an understanding of: proven methodologies and strategies, understandings about poverty and how these perspectives might have changed

over time; and approaches to collaboration. Before conducting the semi-structured interview, the researcher requested and obtained a signed consent agreement which included: 1. Introduction, 2. Purpose, 3. Procedure, 4. Time required, 5. Voluntary participation and right to withdraw at any time, 6. Declaration of no known risks, 7. Benefits, 8. Confidentiality/Anonymity, 9. Statement on how results will be shared, 10. Publication, and 11. Before you sign statement about the nature of their agreement including digitally recording the interview. (Sensing 235-236).

Data Analysis

The qualitative raw data generated during the research process was compiled into logical, meaningful categories to be examined in a holistic fashion in an attempt to communicate the interpretation to others. Thick descriptions were used to make explicit the fullness of the researcher's understanding of the implied range of meaning of the social settings, actions, and words gleaned during the interviews and focus group. Moschella's three ways to read data were used: 1. a literal reading highlighting particular words, phrases, language, interruptions, and gestures, 2. an interpretive reading in which the researcher selected and organized recorded interviews and written notes according to implied or inferred meanings, and 3. a reflexive reading that brought to bear my personal feelings and understandings of the data. The researcher generated themes, categories, and patterns through a close inspection of and analysis of data. Both slippages and silences were considered. Slippages in the data were analyzed by reviewing the data and considering "what is not congruent in the data?" or "what is contradictory in nature? Silences (omissions) in the data were analyzed by considering what was not stated and

considering the implications of what was not stated. This analysis of exceptions elucidated the findings (Sensing 194-202).

The researcher generally followed Tesch's eight steps to consider: 1. get a sense of the whole by carefully reading entire transcripts and jotted down ideas, 2. evaluated the substance of one of the interviews and documented thoughts 3. made a list of all topics and clustered them into major topics, unique topics, and leftovers, 4. coded topics, 5. found descriptive topical words, categorized, and analyzed interrelationships (themes, patterns), 6. finalized decision on coded items and arranged them, 7. assembled data material by category and made preliminary analysis, 8. recoded existing data (Sensing 204-205).

CHAPTER 4

EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter describes both the participants and findings as well as a summary of major findings of the project that deals with breaking generational poverty through collaborative efforts in the greater Beaumont, Texas area. Beaumont has a large number of individuals and families who experience generational poverty. A significant number of persons seem unable to or perhaps uninspired to break the cycle, which then ends up being passed on from generation to generation. McCabe Roberts Avenue (MCRA) UMC and other entities either have not done enough or done the right things to help break this cycle of poverty. The purpose of this study was to investigate what ministries MCRA might develop and how the church might collaborate with local ministry partners to help break the cycle of generational poverty in the Beaumont, Texas area.

Participants

This qualitative research project used purposive sampling method because the integrity of the results depended on using those whose awareness of and participation in breaking the cycle of generational poverty provided "information-rich" responses. The researcher chose persons who have a vested interest in breaking the cycle of generational poverty, generally knowledgeable about it, fit the relevant demographics of this project, and have a particular phenomenal reputation for helping the poor (Sensing 83-84). The researcher chose the participants because they fit the aforementioned criteria.

Each group of clustered interviewees was directed to particular questions that would address RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3 respectively. However, the participants were also

free to discuss other sub questions that may be dealt with under a RQ that was not necessarily their focus as the guided questions allowed. The reporting of the findings may reflect this interface of responses from various groups, while keeping each group's focus on each question respectively. The total number of interviewees was fourteen, categorized in the following ways:

1. Research Question #1 was answered in a Focus Group comprised of four McCabe Roberts Avenue UMC's leaders who function in ministries to help break the cycle of generational poverty. These ministries include the food pantry, Community Garden, collaboration with community based youth programs, area schools, and food insufficiency agencies. MCRA also functions as a referral center for poor people looking for help.
2. Research Question #2 was answered by two church leaders and two key staff leaders; total interviewees were four. One church is Houston based and nationally respected for its twenty-five plus years of helping to break the cycle of generational poverty. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, this church has helped many persons move from dependency to self-sufficiency. For over five years, the other church located in MCRA's mission field has been highly regarded in the Greater Beaumont area as a successful ministry with the least, the lost, and the last. Both congregations work collaboratively.
3. Research #3 was answered by two Beaumont area not-for-profit agencies: one large, long established and secular and the other newer, smaller, and religious. Total interviewees were four from the large entity and two from the smaller entity for a total of six. The large entity primarily deals with food insufficiency

by collaborating with entities to provide food for indigent persons. This agency conducts an area-wide training with its collaborative partner agencies on how to effectively deal with the poor; attendees inevitably collaborate with each other. The newer smaller entity collaborates with the school system, churches, community entities, businesses, and individuals to help break the cycle of generational poverty; this religious (Christian) entity honors regulatory requirements related to proselytizing but expressly hopes that their charitable deeds will allow recipients to experience the love of Christ.

Charts and Graphs (Figures 1 and 2) follow with a general overview of the demographics of the participants of the study. The researcher presents more detailed information in these numbered paragraphs.

1. For Research Question #1, the researcher interviewed four persons in a Focus Group: three Blacks and one White; three females and one male. All were middle-aged laypersons and one was a clergy (the researcher's) spouse; two were empty-nesters, one is currently raising teenagers, and one childless. Three had some college and one a college graduate; three were volunteers and one employed. One had 4-10 and three had 11-20 years of experience. One had personal life experience of breaking the poverty cycle and another broke out of long-term situational poverty.
2. For Research Question #2, the researcher used Semi-Structured Interviews: all four persons were Black and middle-aged, two male and two female; three were clergy and one a lay minister. Three were empty-nesters and one currently raises a young son and teenage daughter; three were college educated

and two of those have Seminary training and the fourth interviewee had some college. Two had 11-20 and two had 21-30 years of experience. One had personally experienced breaking the poverty cycle.

3. For Research Question #3, the researcher used Semi-Structured Interviews with six persons: four at the larger entity and two at the smaller entity. The four at the larger entity included the Executive Director and two managers (one was the recently departed manager and the other was the successor and their responsibilities were to collaborate with schools and others to make food available to poor families through their children) and a separate interview with the manager specifically responsible for collaborating with other entities and individuals. The Executive Director was a White married middle-aged college educated male with an advanced Seminary degree. The outgoing manager was a White married middle-aged college educated female and the recent hire was a Black single middle-aged college educated female. The other manager was a married White college educated female who has raised thirty foster children and hosted fifty exchange students. All were empty-nesters. With the smaller entity, the researcher interviewed two managers. One manager oversees the entire operation and is a White married female college-educated with two self-sufficient adult children and a foster child at home. The other manager oversees projects and is a Black married (clergy spouse) college-educated female with two self-sufficient adult children and one child at home. Total interviewees were six for Research Question #3. Four had 4-10 and two had 11-20 years of experience.

PARTICIPANTS

Chart 4.1 Totals, Race, Gender, and Marital Status

All Participants Are Middle Age.

Research Questions	Total Participants	Race		Gender		Marital Status	
		Black	White	Female	Male	Married	Single
R. Q. 1	4	3	1	3	1	4	---
R. Q. 2	4	4	---	2	2	3	1
R. Q. 3	6	2	4	5	1	5	1
Totals	14	9	5	10	4	12	2

Chart 4.2 Entity, Education and Experience

Research Questions	Religious	Secular	Education			Employed	Volunteers	Years of Experience		
			SC	C	S			A	B	C
R. Q. 1	3	1	3	1	---	1	3		1	3
R. Q. 2	4	---	1	1	2	3	1		---	2
R. Q. 3	---	6	---	5	1	6	---		4	2
Totals	7	7	4	7	3	10	4		5	7

Education Legend

SC = Some College

C = Bachelors, Masters

S = Seminary Graduate or Attending

Experience Legend

A = 4 -10

B = 11 – 20

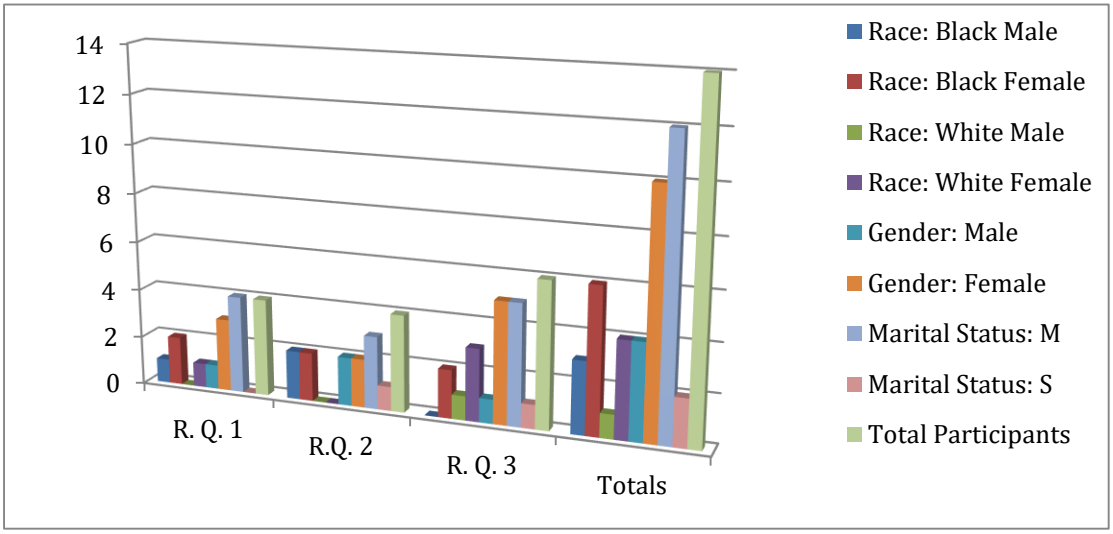
C = 21-30

Marital Status

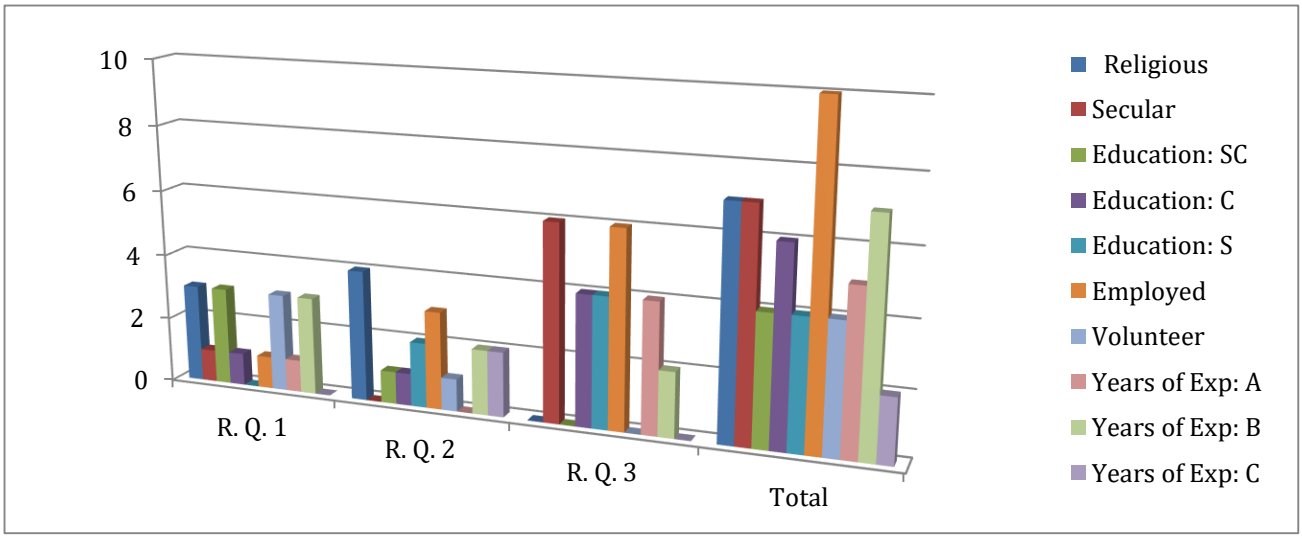
M = Married

S = Single

Graph 4.1 Totals, Race, Gender, and Marital Status
All Participants Are Middle Age.



Graph 4.2 Entity, Education, and Experience



Legend

Education	***Years of Experience***	***Marital Status***
SC = Some College	*A = 4-10*	*M Married*
C = Bachelors, Masters	*B = 11-20*	*S = Single*
S = Seminary Graduate or Attending	*C = 21-30*	

Research Question #1: Description of Evidence

What ministries is McCabe Roberts Avenue (MCRA) UMC engaged in and what are the challenges to help break the cycle of generational poverty in the Beaumont, Texas area?

A focus group comprised of MCRA's leaders represented the participants for Research Question #1. To address this research question, a number of sub-questions were drafted to guide the focus group discussion. These are recorded subsequently and followed by a brief review of responses gathered from the discussions.

Asked as to what motivated the ministry to help break the cycle of poverty and how they see their role, participants responded based on ecclesiological and missional understandings which informed MCRA's praxis.

All participants of the focus group agreed that the motivation initially came from Christ's call and expectation. Elizabeth stated "I think that's what Christ called us to do. We've got plenty, I mean that's what He expects of us to care for the needy, the poor, elderly, disabled."

Lorraine stated that a hurricane motivated the church to act:

> In 2005 when Hurricane Rita hit, the former pastor saw a need for people to come together and help those who were hurt by this natural disaster. MCRA was inspired to develop a food pantry and obtain its supplies from the Southeast Texas Food Bank. As the food pantry grew, the leadership saw a huge demand from persons of different races and backgrounds who needed help. Relationships with the Food Bank, other entities and people in need helped establish the church as both a food resource and referral center.

Lorraine talked about the impact of relating to the poor: “One lady had HIV/AIDS and just came to visit me in the office. She said ‘I have AIDS and I am dying.’ I said, ‘okay.’ And I said, ‘Well, what can I do?’ She said, ‘There is nothing you can do.’ She said, ‘I just want your company.’”

Samuel spoke about being motivated to participate in the Inspire, Encourage, and Achieve (IEA) program for at-risk youth held at MCRA. He said:

> to break that cycle of generational poverty, it is a long process but it starts with the kids, one kid at a time, you can get one changed and focused and that person develops his or her dreams or aspirations of finishing college or high school, not getting pregnant while in high school, having to dropout, then work that minimum wage job or get on welfare trying to make ends meet, the stress and the pressures, they go along with that and just pass that on. I have it in my family, its three generations and they are doing the same thing their mother did.

Extending her ministry beyond the walls of MCRA, Elizabeth was motivated to serve the poor through Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) for abused children. Elizabeth develops a relationship with the child and family support system. Through Elizabeth’s involvement, she discovered that part of the relationship development involves touch: “And many times they will come when I go in the house and they will all try to get around me and see how many of them can get on my lap, they just want my hand on their back”.

Growing Community, Inc. (an IRS 501 (c)(3) not-for-profit corporation) the entity primarily responsible for the church’s community outreach developed a community

garden because MCRA saw a need to provide healthy alternatives to the poor. Martha stated:

> …starting the community garden with the vision of getting the community involved and helping people to learn about healthy sustainable nutrition. . . The role that we experience as a church family is that we have created collaborations and like was said earlier, we are a referral center. . . Growing Community, Inc. (GCI) was not just a community garden, it's about changing lives . . . When the kids come, we teach them about entrepreneurship and about building relationships and about being a person of their word before they even get into the garden . . . GCI is instrumental in helping reach families and youth and giving them a new way of thinking by empowering them.

These comments convey that the motivation for MCRA to be engaged in breaking the poverty cycle emerged from an understanding of how Christ expects His church to respond to perceived needs. By perceiving needs emanating from both disasters and the pervasive general lack of economic resources, MCRA was motivated to respond in a manner reflecting Christ's call and expectation.

In response to what role, if any, does spiritual disciplines such as prayer, worship (including stewardship) play in this effort to break the cycle of generational poverty, participants agreed that prayer reinforces Christian beliefs and focuses members on the church's mission "changing lives and reshaping futures for Jesus Christ."

One participant stated that "Prayer gives people hope. . .. People in the world need hope and especially people in poverty feel a real hopelessness and lack of self-esteem, a real loss of direction and focus and where is my life going to be, is it going to be any

different than generationally we have been living?" Another participant stated that the Sunday morning prayer power inspired through the church's Re-Imaging Conference has helped the church realize that God is the source and supply of all that the congregation needs to help break the cycle of generational poverty:

> We realized that God is the source and that prayer is not the last thing we do, it's the first thing we do. And to empower us as a congregation to know that even in the midst of what we see on a daily basis and all the needs that are around us that overwhelm us, that we have a heart for, that our resources don't seem to match the need, that God is able to do what we ask Him to do when we believe in prayer.

The focus group emphasized the intrinsic significance of prayer to both the poor and MCRA's efforts to help break the poverty cycle. Prayer inspires hope in the poor that life can be better. Prayer guides and empowers MCRA in this ministry.

When asked what role, if any, does systemic institutional barriers play in hampering their mission to help break the cycle of generational poverty, Elizabeth captured the essence of the group's response in this way: ". . . institutional bias is a huge problem and few people are willing to admit the existence of it and the overwhelming impact that it has on people's lives in terms of not being able to get ahead or have equality in terms of opportunity." Elizabeth later indicated that biases are not limited to race: "not just racial but gender and ageism." One respondent observed that systemic institutional influences can be either productive or destructive: "We are all connected to some type of systemic structure and some are destructive and some are leaning towards trying to break those roots that continue to divide us." The focus group's consensus was that the Prison Industrial Complex [an example of a systemic institutional barrier]

sustains itself through racial bias and the lack of advocacy for the poor. A respondent exclaimed “Look at the incarceration rates I mean anybody can figure out what’s happening and why isn’t that Black child with a hoodie on being told that he can be a Chemical Engineer instead of you are not going to be anything”. It was noted that entrepreneurs use third grade test scores to determine how many prisons to build for the future: “It’s such a money making thing and there is no voice for the underserved, they pay the price for this by becoming a part of a system [Criminal Justice] that is not designed for their success.”

One respondent shared her chagrin that in spite of the fact that social media and 24-hour news makes the public very aware of systemic institutional barriers, the moral outrage is non-existent:

> there is still an insensitivity to the pain of the poor in general and Black people in particular. And with all the influx of racial disparities so common in the news because of social media. . . Nobody ever says, ‘I acknowledge your pain.’. . . Or that I am doing everything that I can as a White Woman to say to my White girl friends no this stops here . . . They won’t acknowledge the pain because it is a non-issue, it’s a non-problem for them.

Samuel expressed his optimism about the possibility of a breakthrough in systemic institutional barriers: “McCabe Roberts Avenue UMC is a good example of what the world could look like. We are diverse…the Methodists don’t condone racism, sexism…so we could be a light to one person at a time…It takes time…It is generational but it takes time to break the cycle. God has a plan; His plan is in motion.”

The focus group noted the existence and role of systemic institutional barriers as root causes in generational poverty. Dialogue related to a societal need to acknowledge and remove barriers of classism often evidenced through racism, sexism, and ageism. Although a serious concern, the group expressed some hope in the possibilities for removing these barriers

In response to the question, "What role, if any, does individual/peer/familial detrimental behavior play in hampering your mission to help the poor? Participants agreed that systemic institutional barriers can be viewed as causes and detrimental behavior as the effects. One respondent expressed it this way:

> …triggers to the woundedness from all of that institutional racism and all of those things, when there are triggers to anything, any type of abuse, those triggers come and kick off behaviors that can be detrimental because people feel separated, insecure, angry. In our Western culture which avoids dealing with grief and pain-people are told to 'just suck it up.'

The group provided examples of detrimental behavior which can adversely affect ministry efforts and named them as follows: "Drug addiction, prostitution, human trafficking, lack of education, burglary, diseases, poor nutrition, lack of mental health care, and violence."

The focus group perceived destructive behavior as the effects of systemic institutional barriers. The destructive behavior can be reflected in a wide range of actions which require acknowledgement of grief and pain as an integral start to the healing process.

Last were the questions about what any of the ministry leaders had done which he or she considered a success? What can be improved? What has been attempted but will not be pursued again and why? The responses here were varied.

According to the focus group, community outreach and collaborations have been very successful in this church. Martha stated:

> we have had a lot of successes with the Community Garden…connecting with the community and the area schools…connecting with organizations in the area that are service oriented, participating with the Episcopal Church's health alliance and other city service entities to educate and provide resources for people in need...We are not just a Sunday morning church. We host the only Cocaine Anonymous meeting in the Greater Beaumont area and we collaborate with Halfway houses and the community.

One respondent stated that MCRA has been successful in building a diverse [bi-racial] community and could yet do better: "I feel like it's a marketing issue because there are lots of people who would come to a place where they are truly accepted and wanted and where there is hope and where they will be with people who are different from them but alike in the sense that we are truly children of God. . . I feel like this is a unique place." Another participant posed questions for consideration: "If we had the resources to refurbish our facilities, we could do some of the things that we pray about doing. What would it be like to have a Pre-K school here, a place for ex-offenders to come to learn life skills." Someone else mentioned that the "Food pantry needs some improvement and reorganization." In spite of the researcher's prompting, the group gave no answer about what MCRA should not do again as it related to ministry with the poor.

Given the above responses, it is apparent that MCRA's engagement in spiritual formation and discipleship informs the church in how to help break the cycle of generational poverty through collaborative efforts. These disciplines have been instrumental in empowering and guiding MCRA's ministry team to help break the poverty cycle. Just as MCRA finds spiritual formation and discipleship helpful in guiding this ministry, there exists a vital need to be strategic and missional by inculcating these same disciplines in the ministry with the generationally poor. The existing ministries include working with the Community Garden, area schools, CASA (advocates for abused children), Food Bank, IEA (at-risk youth), Cocaine Anonymous, Episcopal Health Alliance and referral resource for the poor. Also, as a merged bi-racial congregation that practices intentional inclusivity, MCRA's leadership tends to be passionate about addressing both systemic institutional barriers (causes) as well as destructive behavior (effects) which pose challenges to breaking poverty cycles.

Some of the challenges to creating an effective ministry that can break the generational poverty cycle as identified by the respondents are:

- Insensitivity to the pain of the poor,
- Low expectations of the poor can be particularly damaging to the young,
- Hopelessness evidenced through habitual destructive behaviors (effects) resultant from the pervasive invisible yet real systemic institutional barriers (causes),
- High incarceration rates of minority persons,
- Lack of public moral outrage about social injustices, and

- MCRA's limited marketing adversely affects its ability to attract people to a congregation that intentionally practices unconditional love and acceptance for all.

Research Question #2: Description of Evidence

What steps can McCabe Roberts Avenue (MCRA) UMC take to identify or develop a life transforming ministry which helps to break the cycle of generational poverty in the Beaumont, Texas area?

In an effort to learn from transformational ministries, two other churches highly reputed for their work with the poor represented the participants for Research Question #2. To address this research question, a number of sub-questions were drafted to guide the Semi-Structured Interviews. These sub-questions were designed to glean insights from these transformational ministries on the steps that MCRA can take to further develop its ministries. These are recorded subsequently and followed by a brief review of responses gathered from the discussions.

In an effort to inspire MCRA in its own ministries, these other church leaders were asked what motivated them to start or continue their own ministries to help break the cycle of generational poverty. These respondents were touched by need. Their engagement in helping to break the poverty cycle resulted from a divinely ignited passion to make a difference after observing the anguish and cyclical nature of poverty. Kevin was touched by seeing the need of family members in poverty and prompted his desire to be a leader who made a difference: "Seeing a consistent repetitiveness of families going through poverty…just burnt my heart and I asked the Lord to give me something that I could do to make an impact." Pamela perceived that her Senior Pastor Kevin had received a vision from God "to save the homeless, helpless, and hopeless."

Tiffany saw the need and felt it. She wanted to meet the need by responding in love but give the poor some tangible support that would lead to transformation. She said, "The more a person would come [to this church] the beginning of their transformation would occur just the consistency of seeing the same people who felt loved but their eyes said they needed more…The more services we provided the more we saw that more was needed to help them progress to a different level." Tiffany perceived that starting with men would be a way to address the cycle of poverty "because men were fathers and grandfathers of people and so if they could be in a position to get themselves better, then it would make their families better." It was further explained that "In the beginning, the Senior Pastors developed a motto 'tearing down walls and building bridges.'" When the Senior Pastors first came and saw the homeless sleeping on the church's steps, they desired to create a culture where the poor would experience unconditional love "regardless of what they looked like, smelled like, were wearing, they could enter the church and be fully embraced." Elisha was motivated by his call to ministry and how he defined the needs of the mission field. Upon accepting a call to ministry, "each minister [from his home church] I talked to told me that answering a call to ministry was answering a call to serve. This church was situated geographically in the middle of a community of pain." Elisha identified that the needs were HIV, homelessness, and hunger. Elisha became acutely aware and conscious of the need by reading Rev. Cecil Williams' book (*No Hiding Place: Empowerment and Recovery for our Troubled Communities*). Rev. Williams ministered in a similar context. After reading the book, Elisha proceeded to develop a strategy and raise a cohort to serve those in need.

The responses to this sub-question revealed that these two transformational ministries were motivated by need. The leaders observed people experiencing the devastating pain of poverty that they felt compelled to help break the cycle.

To assist MCRA in developing deeper insights about the challenges related to breaking poverty cycles, the researcher asked several additional questions: How do you effectively minister to the poor considering the systemic institutional barriers? How do you effectively minister while dealing with the destructive behavioral challenges? Half of the participants responded with clarity on their perspective about systemic institutional barriers, and the other participants did not grasp the concept but rather focused solely on destructive behavioral challenges without any discernible comprehension of the former.

One respondent explained that institutions can fail to make quality decisions to benefit people because of its inherent racism which "limits true freedom." This participant further expounded on the praxis of being an advocate for the poor to help them navigate through the system. They said, "speak up for them for their medication compliance, to speak up for them when we are trying to get their Social Security done for them. . . help with court dates." One participant very passionately spoke of advocating for the poor by representing their interests at the seats of power: "You become their voice. You sit at the tables of City Government. You sit on committees that are responsible for administering funds to assist the poor. The transition of the neighborhood has resulted in gentrification which adversely affects the poor…This causes you to assume an activist role."

Elisha extensively described his hypothesis that the "War on Poverty sought to displace people from their neighborhoods and gentrify communities." Participant

expressed that this "War was further supported by the War on Drugs which punished the low level drug pushers while clandestinely allowing large drug shipments into the country which were funneled to the poorer neighborhoods thereby wrecking chaos." He further contended:

> The third strategy was the three strike rule which resulted in shipping poor predominantly Black men to prison who often lacked the resources for high quality legal representation. Race has been the dividing line between the haves and the have-nots. The systemic institutionalization of people of color through an intricate system of minimizing opportunity, creating alternative opportunity in criminalized culture, and punishing the fake opportunity that was created in aggressive dramatic ways, crippling that person without the ability to sign a lease, gain adequate employment, which ultimately does the same thing the plantations did and that was keep the slave, the male slave being in diminished view of their families based on their inability to respond to a system that was cruel and unusual.

One participant further articulated an understanding of the nature of systemic institutional barriers by saying that it is important to "walk around your neighborhood to identify those in most need . . . access their needs . . . develop a cohort to address the needs and collaborate with others."

The respondents who did answer this portion of the question related to systemic institutional barriers addressed the need for advocacy and a historical understanding to properly address this issue. Advocacy occurs in two ways: representing the poor at the seats of power and helping the power to navigate through the system. Historical

understandings provide greater insights for future assessments needed to equip teams and develop collaborations.

On individual destructive behavior, another respondent commented that "the greatest approach always is love, understanding, and listening." Pamela focused more on the power of God to break self-destructive behavior:

> Some people are lazy and feel like the world owes them something . . . and because the world is not giving it to them, they try crime or turn to this alternative life to make ends meet instead of trusting God. Destructive behavior can be substance abuse, mental health diagnosis and not receiving proper treatment for it, abusive relationships. . .. You do not have to own what your ancestors did. You can speak life and you can cut the generational curses if you have faith in God and you trust that this process can happen and you can do it.

She broke out of the poverty cycle and was previously involved in some destructive behaviors. She contends that this past experience is vital, and perhaps necessary, to help others break the cycle.

Tiffany recommended tangible support: Collaborate with local hospitals to help people get the medication that they need. Many poor people have undiagnosed mental health challenges and need help navigating through the system to get the help that they need: "we collaborated with [medical group(s)] who were able to have volunteer nurse practitioner services that gave us surplus medications or samples so people could continue their medication." She shared a current project that is being formulated to deal with destructive behavior: "Provide permanent housing to walk with persons through their life transformations: we're doing housing and now we're able to see what full cycle

of walking with a person looks like." She also perceives that focusing on the young can break poverty cycles:

> I really believe the largest impact can be made through children in youth ministries. Breaking the cycle may start with that child or youth in the family. You have to get involved with the family... The parent can begin to witness that there is something different about their child and desire to draw off of some of the child's excitement so that they can change, too.

Elisha stated:

> Mark 5 reveals the narrative of a demon possessed man who encounters Jesus. This gives a good account of how Jesus dealt with individual destructive behavior: He makes the person human . . . First he calls attention to the man's humanity, then he engages him at the level of his humanity. . . Let's put another name on it. He sets an expectation for the encounter. That expectation is where all of the change happens. Jesus begins to look at that person beyond the person's own limited self-concept because individual destructive behavior is almost always about a limited self-concept…Jesus elevates the frequency in his life because he has been operating at a very low frequency. . . Jesus makes him an equal- remember that regardless of who wanted to elevate Jesus, he would always retract and return to equal, because if you want to address a person who has been in the midst of individual destructive behavior, what that person has to regain is their own sense of humanity, their own sense of being . . . let's call it hope, because if you really want to impact generational poverty, then you must create relationships with the people in poverty.

In response to dealing with the challenges of destructive behavior, the participants cited several key approaches. One is that God's role is key because through His Word and Spirit, "generational curses" can be broken. Another approach is to collaborate with key mental health professions to help with untreated mental illnesses. A third approach is creating relationships with the poor to facilitate helping them to change limited self-concepts which often precipitate destructive behavior.

To help MCRA expand its understanding and use of discipleship and spiritual formation particularly with the poor, the researcher asked what role, if any, does discipleship and spiritual formation play in this ministry with the generationally poor? The respondents indicated that these disciplines are most helpful in developing authentic relationships between humans and with God. One respondent commented that The Great Commission is scripturally mandated: "Jesus told us to go and make disciples. Discipleship and spiritual formation are life-time processes and requires individual mentorship. The Bible declares that he who the Son sets free, he is free indeed. . . We pray for things. The prayer needs to be that I want to be closer to You." Someone else stated that "on Thursdays, we pray for people who are having life-controlling challenges related to generational curses or situations." Empowerment hour is a time of prayer preceding Sunday morning worship service. Another respondent stated:

> Most people who join this congregation are first-time to Christ as well as generationally poor. The church provides Christian Education opportunities including new members' classes. Small group encounters relate to bible studies as well as life management such as financial freedom, anger management, or support groups. Renovare´, meditation, and other spiritual formation approaches are used

> to connect to the poor . . . Meals served to the poor include messages, prayer, and Holy Communion.

Elisha answered that: “Discipleship precipitated by friendship moves to forming the spirit. Discipleship has to be precipitated by friendship, which encompasses a willingness to make that person family, which ultimately leads to that person seeing their responsibility to help somebody else.”

The respondents use a small group approach with the poor to in their discipleship and spiritual formation efforts with the poor. Small groups can involve various persons or it can be individual mentorship. The groups may be bible studies, new members’ classes, topical classes, or support groups.

To help MCRA find out how these transformational ministries satisfied tangible needs, the researcher asked how did you identify, develop, and secure contributions/grant funding/church financial support for this ministry? The participants indicated that an inspired vision compels people to give. Creating an IRS 501 (c)(3) not-for-profit corporation facilitated pursuing and securing external funding. Kevin believes in inspiring membership to support ministry: “find a need and fill it, find a heart and heal it. We had not had many grants because I think it is the M.O. [Modus Operandi] as a believer to sow and to give because a seed is only a harvest toward a life being changed.” Pamela stated, “Our church is known as an Outreach Ministry that helps people, people have a tendency to gravitate towards us and they bless us with a lot of stuff. . . When people sow into this Ministry, they sow into good grounds.” Tiffany shared:

> Focus on getting people to be passionate about the mission and they will bring the resources. The original members that came to the church brought financial

> resources because this core group was passionate about this particular mission [of serving the poor]. Growth precipitated the need to develop an IRS 501 (c)(3) not-for-profit corporation which expanded fund raising opportunities. By establishing an IRS 501 (c)(3) not-for-profit corporation, we became eligible to apply for private foundational funds, governmental grants, and local funding opportunities. We have to honor the restrictions on proselytizing which causes us to be 'creative evangelists' so that participants don't feel like we are beating them over the head with the Bible yet by experiencing unconditional love they leave with a hope that they might consider comes from being a believer in Christ Jesus.

Elisha stated:

> Even in the context of church, the real world requires that services are paid for in cash. Jesus told His disciples to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. . . It's a delicate balance needed for sustainability . . . Sustainability must be couched in reality. We raise money by remembering what the goal is and make sure our members stay connected to this goal of helping the poor. This ministry also applies and receives grant funds and has wealthy members who give substantial amounts to help the poor.

The initial and primary means of securing financial support lies in casting a compelling vision and insuring that members stay connected to it. A compelling vision can bring both financial and human resources to help deliver quality services. An IRS 501 (c)(3) not-for-profit corporation provides a source for external funding.

To help MCRA explore the possibilities for its ministries, the researcher asked the transformational ministry leaders to imagine that you could do something to enhance

their own ministries, what would it be? One respondent dreams of a ministry where all needs can be met at one location:

> One-stop shop. . . I am praying for a facility that's really close to my church . . . where they can stay, be ministered to on a complete basis, help them to use their tools that they have been given and the gifts they have been given so that they can get back on their feet and tap into what they were created to be. . . Everything will be generated at this one location where there will be family resources, family counseling, kids' tutoring. . . The whole person to be ministered to . . . would allow the person to have accountability under the right umbrella of the right vision and right source.

Another respondent envisions a greater level of saving souls: "I'm in expectation for God to take us to another level. . . The next wave of souls will be even hungrier for God than the ones we have now. . .. This next wave will be a vital part of what God is planning next for this ministry."

Tiffany desires to focus on a new population of persons representing the generationally poor:

> Focus on this new generation of homeless and poor which are the young adults that have aged out of care from the state or county. . . The average age of homelessness in this city has decreased from 30's/40's to 18-35. . . They have not received social skills or academic skills to apply for a job and support themselves. . . They do not have an understanding of basic life skills.

Another participant was more philosophical and morose in expressing his desire. He expressed a desire to start over with less focus on building organizations which

constantly require so much money to sustain itself that the true mission of building people gets lost:

> We have a dependency addiction on funding which requires us to build more stuff. . . Jesus said 'follow me' and I don't promise you a nice place to stay. But what I can promise you is peace, not as the world gives. . . If we can take our collective will and intelligence and research to help young men and women avoid the pitfalls, traps of institutional ministry and move them into places, into very intentional pockets of need to address those very intentional pockets by showing them how not to institutionalize the work to the point where it literally has to feed on itself in order to survive---that's what the world needs. . . Howard Thurman had a word on that 'ultimately, the world needs people who come alive.'

MCRA can take similar steps to identify or develop a life transforming ministry to help break poverty cycles. The researcher gleaned from the above comments that these other churches who have experienced great success in breaking poverty cycles were initially motivated by need. These church leaders were profoundly touched by a need to transform generations and proceeded to identify those needs by loving and listening to God and the poor. The participants agreed on the importance of being immersed in the contextual environments of the divine and mundane. Through a process of continuing discernment, leadership casted a compelling vision to mobilize cohorts to invest human and financial capital in the mission. The compelling vision inspired congregants and other benefactors to financially support it and in some cases, other external funding was sought. Tangentially, advocacy will seek to speak for the poor at the seats of power

(systemic institutional barriers). Directly, advocacy will help the poor navigate through the system.

In all these responses, there was a consensus that ministries should provide tangible support to help break the poverty cycle. When the young experience a change through following Jesus, they can influence the family to seek a more abundant life. Generations can also be transformed by focusing on men who can lead their families out of poverty. Churches must also integrate spiritual formation and discipleship as vital components of the ministry to break the poverty cycle. Churches who work with the poor must also do as Jesus did and that is to help restore human dignity to the poor.

Research Question #3: Description of Evidence

How and with which local entities can McCabe Roberts Avenue (MCRA) UMC most effectively collaborate to help break the cycle of generational poverty?

In an effort to learn from entities with collaborative experience and potential, the researcher interviewed personnel employed by two not-for-profits to participate in Research Question #3. To address this research question, a number of sub-questions were drafted to guide these semi-structured interviews. These are recorded subsequently and followed by a brief review of responses gathered from the discussions.

To help MCRA better understand the need for collaborative efforts, the researcher asked what motivated your entity to develop collaborative efforts to help break the cycle of generational poverty? The recurring answer centered on the enormity and complexity of this issue. Celine mentioned that the need was too great for any one entity to handle by itself: “Once we got involved in in the community we realized how great the need was, we felt overwhelmed and realized that we needed to link arms with other churches and

organizations and volunteers to be more effective." Lisa expressed a similar sentiment: "What was going on in our community was too big for just one organization, we began to look at what other professionals and organizations could do to enhance our efforts." Ed's agency's primary function is addressing food insufficiency. He stated, "You cannot address hunger in a vacuum. There is a need to be aware of community partners and root causes and how to develop partnerships with those other organizations that are addressing root causes in the community and doing what we can in our own limited way to get at some of the root causes." Bonnie shared her understanding that the agency identified the need based on observation: "people seeing the need and reaching out to the community. As the agency grew they began to collaborate with others who were already doing it but to be able to offer more to the community they came together to form our agency." This agency primarily deals with food insufficiency by using other entities (with other poverty related emphases) to distribute its food.

The respondents consistently cited the enormity and complexity of the issue as motivating factors to develop collaborations. The undertone appeared to be recognizing that effectiveness and efficiency mandated a holistic approach which could not be adequately addressed by any one entity.

To provide MCRA practical approaches to collaborative potential, the researcher asked how does your organization work with other entities to help break the cycle of generational poverty in the Beaumont, Texas area? These participants' recurring answer was that an active pursuit of relationships was vitally necessary. One participant commented on pursuing relationships, sharing information, and working together: *"*We form relationships, we believe in relationships and partnerships. We hear of a church that

wants to be involved or we meet with churches, make phone calls, let them know what's going on and of any needs that we know about." Another participant shared her approach of accessing the needs of the participants and finding partners who can help fulfill those needs: "After we've done assessments, we determine what the need is and then we sit down with the organization or agency and say, Okay, our ladies need GED's. Our ladies need jobs. They need jobs and they also need résumés. How can we work together to meet their needs?" This agency focuses on first meeting the needs of women as the best way to impact the family and future generations.

Ed talked about good relationships in the community and awareness of the entities' services facilitates referrals and coordination of service delivery (to optimize service delivery and avoid duplication of effort): "We have to be aware of the partnerships in the community that are addressing those other issues and know where to send people to address those other matters. . . Serving on community committees with those other entities expands our reach. . .. Other times, it's doing research to find out what's going on in the community." Having big events and inviting other entities facilitates networking. Bonnie's dependence on other grass roots entities to provide information on needs helps because those entities have built trust with people that her agency cannot reach: "I depend on the community. I depend on our agencies to tell me what the needs are because I don't have the luxury to develop the trust with their clients that they have. Also serving on boards can be very helpful in developing partnerships with collaborative potential."

The respondents emphasized the need to develop relationships through various ways. Face-to-face contacts and phone calls were cited as important in accessing the

needs of participants and searching for partners who can help. Serving on committees or boards, hosting big events [for example training events or banquets], and doing research can result in collaborations. MCRA can pursue further opportunities with and through these two entities who appear willing to expand their reach.

To obtain awareness of future agency plans that might eventually avail MCRA of collaboration opportunities, the researcher asked what future plans are being developed to collaborate with others to help break the cycle of generational poverty? The participants shared specific plans related to health, education, and social services signaling that a holistic approach would be pursued. Celine verbalized that because there are multiple and often complex issues related to generational poverty, her entity is developing a holistic model to address needs of both the children and their mothers. This holistic model includes mentorship with the children and educational support as well as career development with their mothers. Lisa (who works in the same agency as Celine) expressed the plans this way: “We will work with area universities, social services, educational programs to offer a total package for single moms who are stable and ready to move forward. Stability is defined as mentally balanced and eager to pursue a viable career.” Stacy stated that the food insufficiency agency is developing a diabetic program by taking the initiative to bring together healthcare clinics and identify ways in which this entity can distribute healthier food boxes to the diabetic community. Bonnie is developing a new initiative to collaborate with local businesses and the school district to make food available through schools: “We have to have local businesses participate in that for it to be successful. But a component of that is also working with the school district to get food pantries at each school so that parents can go to school to get their

food and not have to wait for food from other areas." Also, they are beginning a program called Texas Sprouts which focuses on getting more fresh produce to people to ensure more nutritious meals. In addition, this organization is building a data base of not-for-profits to function as a reference to locate potential partners and more efficiently resource existing partners.

The future plans for collaborative potential reflect a holistic consciousness of the complexity of needs. Programs to benefit women and children relate to healthy nutrition, educational and career advancement. Potential opportunities exist for MCRA to provide human, financial, and possibly physical space for these programs.

To help MCRA know how to be effective in collaborations, the researcher asked what are the fundamental requirements for a successful collaborative effort to help break the cycle of generational poverty, and what practices or situations should be avoided? Viable practices were identified as relationship development, written plans and agreements, integrity and achievable goals/deliverables. One participant emphasized relationship building is important and being in position for God to make things happen. "Build relationships, build relationships, build relationships. . . Providing opportunities for people to get to know each other and become comfortable together is so important. We look for the same heart and passion and we've met people by divine intervention." She further states that this entity is open to work with profit-oriented businesses as well as not-for-profit entities. This Christian based entity, which has an evangelistic thrust, is also open to work with individuals who are not believers. They believe that sharing the love of Christ (without violating any funding/legal parameters) is important even if non-

believers do not convert. Another participant mentioned that communication between all parties is a vital requirement:

> Communicating with the participant requires that you listen to access the need . . . involve the whole family so that you can form a team to help the process which builds trust. . . The goal is to move them from level to level. Constant communication with business partners allows you to build relationships so that when you approach them about a job for your participants, then they are more inclined to help you make a placement. Practices that should be avoided include a lack of communication, not having anything in writing, not having a good plan-before you get started there should always be a good plan in place, not over promising, be upfront about what you expect from your work together, have a clear understanding of what you expect from them, what they're expecting from you . . . don't pass any money.

Ed focused on the importance of knowing one's mission and staying faithful to it helps to set appropriate boundaries which can be crucial to developing productive collaborations. He said, "Mature not-for-profits have identified their mission and they know what their role is which keeps them from trying to be everything to everybody thereby avoiding potential disaster. . .. Have the humility to listen to ideas from others who have a role different than yours." This entity provides volunteers opportunities to supplement their efforts but also so that people can return to the community with a better understanding of this entity's mission. This organization emphasizes the importance of communicating with other entities to reduce the possibility of duplicity of effort which hampers effectiveness. They provide mass training and conferences with partner agencies to

enhance communication. Practices to avoid are “being so focused on the greatness of your own entity that you fail to be humble enough to learn about what others are doing which could enhance the goal of helping to break generational poverty.” Bonnie stated that practices to avoid include missional conflicts: “If a church is more interested in building its membership than it is in serving the poor, then this would constitute a conflict.”

The participants cited various practices that MCRA can help it be effective in collaborations. Good practices include relationship development, clear and documented plans, achievable goals/deliverables, knowing one’s mission and staying faithful to it, and focusing on developing people. People development means helping the poor achieve upward mobility. Practices to avoid were passing out money and avoid missional conflicts.

To provide MCRA information on possible collaborative opportunities, the researcher asked what collaborative efforts are available for churches/not-for-profit entities to participate with your agency to help break the cycle of generational poverty? Various opportunities were presented. Celine expressed that volunteers are needed for: 1. Campus Compassion, 2. Neighborhood Initiatives, 3. Personal and Professional Development, and 4. Transitional Housing. These initiatives offer volunteers to help tutor children in schools and neighborhoods as well as provide meals, develop women socially and professionally, and sponsor or furnish apartments for the poor. Thelma shared that entities can access food at low cost and distribute to the poor. Also, “donate to the backpack program which is our collaboration with the schools to provide food to poor

children. The backpack program sends food home with children for the weekend to those who cannot afford to feed their families. To sponsor a kid for a whole year is $175."

These entities indicated that the enormity and complexity of generational poverty mandates collaborative efforts which are holistic. These collaborative efforts must begin and develop by intentional and purposeful relationship building. Networking in the form of serving on community boards, depending on other grassroots organizations for information, inviting local businesses to participate in ministry efforts and hosting or attending training events/fundraisers can optimize results. Strategic planning that entails: documentation of goals, plans, and methods as well as identifying achievable goals provide clarity needed to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of collaborative efforts. In addition, participants explained the need to communicate with business partners and the support teams of those we serve. The group consensus was that it was important to avoid missional conflicts and duplicity of efforts through such collaborative efforts.

Summary of Major Findings

This section summarizes the major findings of *Breaking Generational Poverty through Collaborative Efforts* in the greater Beaumont, Texas area. After examining the description of the findings, the researcher identified eight major findings categorized by research question.

Research Question #1

What ministries is McCabe Roberts Avenue (MCRA) UMC engaged in and what are the challenges to help break the cycle of generational poverty in the Beaumont, Texas area?

- Ministries: Spiritual Formation and Discipleship

- Address Destructive Behavior (effects) through Authentic Relationships
- Challenges: Systemic Institutional Barriers (causes) that lead to Destructive Behavior (effects)

Research Question #2

What steps can McCabe Roberts Avenue (MCRA) UMC take to identify or develop a life transforming ministry which helps to break the cycle of generational poverty in the Beaumont, Texas area?

- Target Transforming Generations
- Create and Cast a Compelling Vision
- Address Systemic Institutional Barriers (causes) through Advocacy

Research Question #3

How and with which local entities can McCabe Roberts Avenue (MCRA) UMC most effectively collaborate to help break the cycle of generational poverty?

- Develop Collaborative Efforts that are Missional and Strategic with entities that are addressing generational poverty and with mental health professionals
- Create Relationships with the Marginalized.

CHAPTER 5

LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter further discusses major findings, implications, limitations, unexpected observations, recommendations, and the impact related to this project to help break the cycle of generational poverty through collaborative efforts in Beaumont, Texas. The number of individuals and families in Beaumont caught in the cycle of generational poverty exceeds the national indicators. A significant number of persons seem unable or uninspired to break the cycle, which is passed from generation to generation. McCabe Roberts Avenue (MCRA) UMC and other entities, including but not limited to other churches, not-for-profit charitable organizations, and businesses, have either not done enough or done the right things to help break this cycle of poverty. The purpose of this study was to investigate what ministries MCRA might develop and how the church might collaborate with local ministry partners to help break the cycle of generational poverty in the Beaumont, Texas area. This study affirmed that transformative ministry to break the poverty cycle requires collaborative efforts because of the enormity and complexity of the problem.

Major Findings

Research Question #1

What ministries is McCabe Roberts Avenue (MCRA) UMC engaged in and what are the challenges to help break the cycle of generational poverty in the Beaumont, Texas area?

First Finding: Ministries-*Spiritual Formation and Discipleship*

The first finding disclosed the role and significance of spiritual formation and discipleship specifically as it relates to prayer. The responses focused on the crucial role of prayer to the ministry of breaking the cycle of generational poverty. Prayer is vital to the church because as MCRA deals with the enormity and complexity of generational poverty, the needs appear daunting. When the church examines its financial and human resources in light of the needs of the generationally poor, MCRA's intent and desires fall very short of helping the poor break the poverty cycle. Through MCRA's weekly prayer power, the church has been able to commune and communicate with God. This communal prayer has enlarged MCRA's reliance on God and increased the church's expectation for divine provision. Through prayer, MCRA grows in relying on God as an Advocate and even the supreme Collaborator. When the ministry leaders pray with the poor and encourage the poor to pray for themselves, God strengthens and restores their hope. The respondents reported that a sense of hopelessness and lack of self-esteem, loss of direction and focus has often caused poor people to doubt that their lives will be different than prior generations. It has been observed that prayer instills hope for the poor and is vital to MCRA's ministry efforts. The respondents' comments conveyed the sentiment that prayer also helps the church and poor experience spiritual growth. What was heard through the respondents describes Richard Foster's three prayer moves:

> 1. Inward-seeking the transformation we need; 2. Upward-seeking the intimacy we need; and 3. Outward-seeking the ministry we need. The movement inward comes first because without interior transformation the movement up into God's glory would overwhelm believers and the movement out into ministry would destroy [ministry servants]" [and possibly further hurt those the believers seek to help]. "As the resistance within believers is overcome by the operations of faith, hope, and love, believers begin moving upward into the divine intimacy, which empowers them for ministry to others. Transformation and intimacy both cry out for ministry. Christians are drawn up into the bosom of God's love not merely to experience acceptance but also so they can give his love to others" (*Prayer* 5-6, 79-80, 167-168).

It was stated that as an act of worship for both the church members and the poor, prayer ought to principally be about being closer to God even in believers' petitions for divine provisions. Being intentional about fostering spiritual formation and discipleship for ministry persons and the poor reiterates the centrality of faith in breaking the cycle.

Second Finding: ***Address Destructive Behavior (effects) through Authentic Relationships***

Another ministry identified by the participants is addressing destructive behavior through authentic relationships. Research disclosed that systemic institutional barriers constituted causes and destructive behavior the effects. Attributing systemic institutional barriers as causes did not alleviate personal responsibility for one's own destructive behavior. However, the intentional sincere development of authentic relationships has

evidenced improvement in behavior, attitude, and outlook. The respondents believed that Christ calls His church to care for the needy, poor, elderly, and disabled. This care includes the ministry of godly touch, which Jesus often practiced. Also, a heart can be touched by active listening which helps to validate a poor person's humanity because poverty can strip a person of his/her dignity, self-esteem, and drive. MCRA in collaboration with its outreach component Growing Community, Inc. (GCI) develops relationships with troubled youth, teaches them the importance of character development, and shares ways to develop healthy relationships. This ministry develops relationships with youth by helping them to develop a vision (God's preferred future) for their lives. By modeling a new way of thinking about life, the young are empowered to be in healthy affirming relationships thereby increasing their emotional, social, and cultural intelligences. Working with youth in the technology lab builds confidence via enhanced computer literacy. MCRA hosts the only Cocaine Anonymous group in the Beaumont Area. This spiritual based fellowship fosters authentic relationships between people most of whom have a family history of addictive behavior that includes generational poverty.

When this issue was addressed in research question #2, a respondent explained that developing relationships require loving [the poor] and exhibiting that love by willingly listening to understand who they are and their plight. Communicating love through active listening can build the trust needed to help address habitual destructive behavior. Jesus modeled this by meeting people at their point of need. According to the respondent, the Mark 5 narrative about the demon possessed, self-mutilating man living in the graveyard who could not be restrained with chains discloses an important lesson on how to deal with destructive behavior. First, they could not restrain the man with physical

means because his issues were spiritual and mental which exposes the futility of solely relying on incarceration as the answer. But Jesus raised expectations by first asking him his name even before casting the legions of demons out of him. Why did Jesus first raise his expectations? Because expectation is where the transformation takes place. Since destructive behavior is often about a limited self-concept, it is imperative to help the person by raising expectations. Asking his name helped the man connect with his humanity. Connecting to his humanity facilitated his reconnecting with the person who was created in the image of God—his true self. Jesus touched this man at his point of need. If believers are to raise expectations, they must find creative holy ways to touch people's lives who exhibit destructive behavior. Unconditional love means "accepting people where they are but loving them enough not to let them stay where they are" which is how God loves people. MCRA's collaborative efforts to deal with destructive behavior must intentionally and strategically connect with the person's humanity. Approaches must be customized to the individual. Similar to John Wesley's class meetings, participants shared that small group venues can enhance the development of authentic relationships. These venues which also augment spiritual growth include bible studies, new members' classes, topical classes, and support groups.

Third Finding: Challenges - *Systemic Institutional Barriers (causes) that lead to Destructive Behaviors (effects)*

As identified by the participants, the main challenge that is faced by MCRA in its efforts to address generational poverty is systemic institutional barriers which lead people to destructive behaviors. These barriers named by the participants include classism and its subcategories of racism, sexism, or ageism. Classism is the umbrella because the other

three “-isms” are specific categories of classism. While this list is not exhaustive, it does portray the areas that the researcher was most concerned with in this study although most of the direct references are about racism. Regardless of the individual efforts of the courageous few, these systemic institutional barriers pose huge challenges to most, and some never completely rise above these barriers. These barriers are so deeply enculturated in American society that they can appear invisible and non-existent to those in the majority-culture who frequently wonder why Black people seem addicted to the topic of inequality. This view brings such statements as, “after all, we all have the same opportunities to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps.” But, “the truth is far too many have neither boots nor straps.” When questioned about systemic institutional barriers, most participants responded with passion and clarity. One respondent was a White sister who experienced frequent taunting from other Whites while caretaking a mentally impaired Black woman. While she was already an advocate for the less fortunate, this experience heightened her sensitivity to systemic institutional barriers and the need to challenge injustices. Others, even church leaders, did not really grasp the concept of systemic institutional barriers and continued to focus on individual destructive behavior (an effect addressed in the second finding). Part of the reason for this myopia is that the enculturated American church tends to view poverty solely through the lens of individual choices without due consideration to systemic institutional barriers. Again, this view does not discount the need for personal responsibility but rather chooses a more comprehensive perspective that considers the pervasiveness of systemic institutional barriers.

In *Advocating for Justice*, the writers contend that the "evangelicals' focus on the relational aspects of poverty—to the detriment of the variable of power as a cause of poverty—has meant that when they come up against those structures of power in practice that limit what relief, rehabilitation, and development can do, they are uncertain about whether to proceed, and if so, how, because they lack the tools to diagnose these structures of institutionalized power and how they operate... As evangelicals, we possess robust theologies for dealing with personal sin but limited resources for facing structural or institutional forms of sin" (Offutt, Bronkema and Murphy Ch. 2).

According to Marva J. Dawn, our civilization flaunts its wealth, while poverty escalates. Laws favor the rich even as the safety net is ripped away from the helpless.

"I [Marva J. Dawn] certainly don't advocate inept welfare that fails to equip citizens with skills for economic survival, but current governmental policies are harming our neighbors" (*The Sense of the Call* Ch. 1). Chan-Rah contends that the power of privilege is that it can go undetected by those who are oppressed by it and even by those who have it. Chan-Rah writes:

> It has allowed some white people to create a world in their own image and a system of values that reinforces the power and privilege of those who are white people. At the same time, because of its invisibility, it has helped foster that those who succeed do so because of their superior intelligence, their hard work or their drive, rather than, at least in part, their privilege.

White privilege not only deals with an economic benefit, but also speaks to a position of emotional and social power that is oftentimes reserved for white Americans (*The Next Evangelism* 72-73). Institutional racism has and continues to play a role in people not

being able to rise above poverty. While it does not eliminate personal responsibility, it does help explain the causes of intergenerational poverty. What the researcher finds most troubling are the long-term effects (destructive behavior) which sometimes appear insurmountable and probably are without both divine intervention and universal human repentance.

In *Churches, Cultures & Leadership*, Branson and Martinez state:

> Most majority-culture people assume that laws, rules, and practices in the United States follow this understanding of fair play. Since the rules are fair, then those with privilege can argue that they earned it "fair and square". But the concept of fair play makes it difficult to deal with structural inequalities between people groups in the United States. This is because the basic assumption is that the playing field is more or less even for all. For example, affirmative action has been one attempt at fair play designed for people of ethnic minorities who have traditionally been excluded from the benefits of American society. Yet one of the (many) reasons it is not working is because fair play is mediated by an individualized view of the problem. Individual members of the dominant culture might recognize that they have some level of privilege, but any action that can be interpreted as adversely affecting them directly is seen as not being fair play. Under current understandings of affirmative action, as a means to overcome prejudice, members of minority groups are given a special "leg up", not because there is a structural problem but because they are personally disadvantaged. But if they accept this help it means they have to accept the interpretation that they as individuals were

> unable to compete "fairly" and that they have received an opportunity they "really" do not deserve. As a result, minority groups see situations in which 1. majority-culture people claim that affirmative action discriminates against them, and 2. people from ethnic minorities who advanced because of affirmative action now work against continuing this policy" (Ch. 6).

The respondents perceived systemic institutional barriers as major causes which tended to trigger destructive behavior. Consensus was that systemic institutional barriers often reflected through classism (racism, sexism, or ageism) often keep people from getting ahead or accessing equal opportunity thereby leading to hopelessness. Hopelessness tends to trigger destructive behavior. Respondents cited the prison industrial complex as a key barrier that sustains itself through racial bias and lack of advocacy for the poor who cannot afford optimal legal representation. Respondents contended that the greed motivated prison industrial complex uses third grade test scores to plan for how many prisons to build. Relatedly, this research project's literature review disclosed that teachers' low academic expectations for the poor tends to adversely affect the children's performance. In spite of the pervasive news coverage of social injustices, there is a lack of public outrage thereby ignoring the pain of poverty precipitated by systemic institutional barriers.

The participants' responses resonated with the intent of the World Bank which issued a joint statement entitled *Ending Extreme Poverty: A Moral and Spiritual Imperative* by 2030. It states:

> Our sacred texts also call us to combat injustice and uplift the poorest in our midst. No one, regardless of sex, age, race, or belief, should be denied

> experiencing the fullness of life. Ending extreme poverty will require a comprehensive approach that tackles its underlying causes---including preventable illness, a lack of access to quality education, joblessness, corruption, violent conflicts, and discrimination against women, ethnic minorities and other groups. It will also necessitate a change in the habits that cause poverty---greed and waste, numbness to the pain of others, and exploitation of people and the natural world. It calls for a holistic and sustainable approach that transforms cultures and institutions, and hearts as well as minds (Carlos 1-2).

Research Question #2

What steps can McCabe Roberts Avenue (MCRA) UMC take to identify or develop a life transforming ministry which helps to break the cycle of generational poverty in the Beaumont, Texas area?

Fourth Finding: *Target Transforming Generations*

A recurring theme about what MCRA can do to collaboratively help break the poverty cycle was the concept of targeting transformation of varying generations. One entity has been highly successful working through the men and another newly formed entity focuses on helping women. However, both perceive that the evidence of success rests in how future generations are impacted. The Texas Annual Conference UMC and the researcher's pastoral charge embrace the idea of investing in the young. Therefore, this approach, while specifically related to the poverty cycle, still resonates with MCRA's ministry thrust. Questions related to breaking the cycle elicited emotional responses and even tears particularly when discussions centered on the young. This finding also

emerged in research question #3 and informs the belief that the cycle can be broken when the young are transformed.

While the researcher is aware of the stereotypical possibilities of using the phrase "culture of poverty," its use here concretizes the need to positively transform the young in order to effectively break the poverty cycle. Oscar Lewis originally coined this phrase to mean that children growing up in poor families would learn to adapt to the values and norms that perpetuated poverty. The children would replicate these in their own lives, creating a cycle of intergenerational poverty (Suh and Heise 1-8). Dr. Ruby Payne's widely acclaimed and roundly criticized self-published work based on the culture of poverty concept uses Hart and Risely's research to explain intergenerational transfer of knowledge. Hart and Risely discovered that by age 3, children of educated families have heard 30 million more words than children from less educated, welfare families. Furthermore, the amount of positive affirmation that children receive varies based on the family's class: educated-6, working class-2, and poor-1. In addition, welfare children receive twice as much negative feedback when compared to professional and working families (A Framework for Understanding Poverty Ch. 2). Therefore, the level of encouragement ascends as income and education rises; conversely, the level of discouragement ascends for lower income and educational levels.

It was emphatically stated that young adults must be considered in breaking the cycle because many have aged out of care (either state or familial) without having developed basic life skills. At a minimum, these basic skills might include interpersonal, academic, cultural or knowledge about the world of work. When these young adults are not considered, they just might continue the cycle. therefore, ministry must be

intentionally strategic to address their needs. MCRA can use these observations to ensure that its ministry activities affect multiple generations.

Fifth Finding: ***Create and Cast a Compelling Vision***

The consensus of the participants was that creating and casting a compelling vision is a crucial step in developing life transforming ministries. The concept of a compelling vision originated because their pastoral leadership was profoundly touched by need. This appears to suggest that when leadership is profoundly touched by the hurts of those caught in generational poverty, it facilitates an environment for God to create a compelling vision. According to one author, "the pastor's job in worship is to provide careful leadership and teach the gospel with strength and wisdom." The role of preaching is vital as it relates to breaking the cycle of generational poverty. "Some congregants consider it important for the preacher to address social injustices such as racism, while others believe that to do so is out of place" (Abrums xxxii). The content of sermons should reflect the substance of the church's vision. The teaching should enable people to understand how the vision can become ingrained in their thoughts and activities and to see how vision was modeled on the lives of biblical characters. Some visionary pastors evaluate the utility of a sermon topic according to whether it fits within the vision for ministry of the church and how adequately they can tie that subject to the vision (Barna 136).

Churches who value effective stewardship have high expectations that people will respond to the call to discipleship which invites worshippers to world-changing mission (Christopher 61-70). For MCRA's goal of breaking the cycles of generational poverty, vital worship can: 1. Ignite, empower, and sustain this ministry and 2. Extend the

ministry experience beyond mere tangible benefits to more transcendent opportunities to more fully know the Resurrected Christ. During the 2014 Texas Annual Conference UMC training event, Brown shared a concept about passionate worship. This concept from his book relates to worship in 3-D: "1. Boutique, 2. Worship by Design, and 3. Technologically Driven." The boutique concept relates to passionate worship in that churches must consider their space and use it creatively for worship and mission. "Worship by design means that churches are very intentional in planning worship and not confined to a routine that fails to connect people to the divine or each other amplifies that worship must build divine and human relationships. Technologically driven means to optimize technology in creating a worship experience which is sensually spiritual and offers opportunities for people to give electronically to maximize resources for this project" (*Zero to 80* 148-172). Effective worship planning must consider the different ways people learn and also contour to the different types (Builders, Boomers, and Busters) of people in the church (Hammett and Pierce 97). Inspiring worship can aid the vision. This type of clarity and intentionality in preparing and executing worship can ignite, empower, and sustain this missional project as well as draw the unchurched/unsaved/de-churched to Jesus Christ.

The researcher approached this area believing that responses would lean toward the need to cast a compelling vision that inspired giving toward the ministry to help break the cycle of generational poverty. The researcher also believed that creating an IRS 501 (c)(3) not-for-profit corporation could be helpful. The research confirmed these perceptions yet disclosed additional types of funding that the not-for-profit corporation could seek such as private foundation monies. Growing Community, Inc. (GCI) which

handles MCRA's community outreach can take steps to identify this type of funding. While philanthropy is commendable, the ministry still requires funds to operate. In an environment of escalating scarcity, a compelling vision is vital to ensure that ministry goals are met. This compelling vision can also stimulate people to use their spiritual gifts and talents to assist because funds are not the only need; people represent a most useful asset.

Sixth Finding: ***Address Systemic Institutional Barriers (causes) through Advocacy***

Addressing systemic institutional barriers was one recurring theme identified by participants as an important step for MCRA to take. It is most often perpetuated by greed representing ubiquitous influences on people's daily lives. One writer proposed a praxis which concretizes addressing systemic institutional barriers through advocacy. Ronald J. Sider presents tangible ideas which fulfill the two roles of advocacy identified by participants and discussed in Chapter 4 which are representing the poor at the seats of power and helping the poor navigate through the system. Ronald J. Sider's specific proposals center on a just welfare policy with the following six goals: 1. End poverty not just welfare; 2. Encourage work by allocating support for the working poor and welfare recipients so that work always is economically advantageous; 3. Strengthen stable, two-parent families-and consequently, seek to reduce divorce, single parenthood, and out-of-wedlock births; therefore, seldom if ever should we offer help to single parents that is not also offered to two-parent families; 4. Recognize each person's God-given dignity, and therefore, maximize growth toward long-term, dignified self-sufficiency and responsibility; 5. Guarantee a generous sufficiency with dignity for all-especially

children-who truly cannot provide for themselves; and 6. Strengthen the institutions of civil society that nurture moral renewal (53, 182).

The underlying theme of *Power and Poverty: Divine and Human Rule in a World of Need* is that "poverty has to do with the way in which human beings use the power God gave us when He created humans. The Book of Origins (Gen. 1-11) ends with two defining stories of human history. On the one hand, is the story of the Tower of Babel, which epitomizes the pride of human beings in their rebellion against God as they seek to concentrate power and build an empire (which inevitably involves violence and oppression). On the other hand, is the genealogy of Noah's son Shem down to Abram, who was destined to be the source of God's alternative way of giving power away" (Hughes 11-12) . "Like the warnings against abusing resident aliens [immigrants], widows, and orphans (Exod. 22.21-24), the instructions about loans to the poor in verses 25-27 are formulated in the first and second person-a direct address by God to His people. In this way, God places Himself directly in the role of special protector to the poor" (Baker 257-258). Perhaps these provisions were designed to prevent what we now know as "pay-day" or "title loans" which charge exorbitant interest to the poor. "The Sinai agreement read from the scroll of Deuteronomy indicated that everything depended upon justice to the *widow*, the *orphan*, and the *stranger* [immigrant]. In the interpretation of Moses, these three, together with the poor, became the test of obedience to the provisions of Sinai" (Brueggeman 51). As quoted in Tisdale's book, James A. Forbes Jr. illustrated the need to build a bridge between the church's benevolent mission and larger systemic causes of poverty:

> To hear that there is a system of impoverishment that is structurally designed so that all our little benevolent works will not really change anything long term until the systems themselves are changed. Our good deeds may bring momentary amelioration to a few, but until the system has been confronted, the system that perpetuates the evil notion that poverty is acceptable, the Kingdom of God cannot and will not be advanced (Ch. 4).

In *Advocating for Justice,* the authors state that "talking about *power* acknowledges that certain individuals and institutions are given (or take upon themselves) the right to make decisions that affect the lives of other people. However, stating that institutions are *powers* acknowledges that they have an identity and force that represent more than the sum of the individuals who work within them, and points to a "spiritual" reality about their ability to constrain or promote human flourishing (or shalom more broadly defined). While much of this is natural, the "spirit" can easily become demonic when it asserts autonomy from God and creates injustices that prey upon the lives of the weak and vulnerable" (Offutt, Bronkema and Murphy). The authors address the need for the church to advocate for the poor.

These biblical and theological foundations support the consensus of the participants which articulated a praxis of advocating for the poor by challenging structures of inequity with the goal of creating structures that foster restoration of fractured lives and reasonable and fair access to the abundant life that Jesus desires for all humankind.

Research Question #3

How and with which local entities can McCabe Roberts Avenue (MCRA) UMC most effectively collaborate to help break the cycle of generational poverty?

Seventh Finding: ***Develop Collaborative Efforts that are Missional and Strategic with entities that are addressing Generational Poverty and with mental health professionals***

The researcher's daily encounters with the poor in this mission field and MCRA's Lay Leader reiterating Jesus' comment "the poor will always be with you" inspired this project. The Lay Leader interpreted Jesus' words to mean that the self-destructive behavioral patterns of poor people are passed from generation to generation. While the researcher believes that Jesus was challenging both systemic institutional tendencies and individual destructive behaviors, he was nevertheless inspired to explore the role of collaboration in helping to break the cycle of generational poverty. All of the participants independently stated that the enormity and complexity of the issue mandates a massive coordinated strategy. This coordinated effort embodies the function of collaborative efforts. Authentic relationships with the triune God and human Creation emerged as key missional components in helping to break the cycle of generational poverty. These authentic relationships between the triune God, other humans, and oneself can be enriched through consistent participation in spiritual formation and discipleship. Authentic relationship evolves through active listening to God (Word and Spirit) and potential or active collaborators. Actively cultivating capital (human and financial) through stewardship (a component of discipleship) and external collaborators provide resources to help break the cycle of generational poverty. The research affirmed this prior reflection and provided breath of substance to not only validate the researcher's perceptions but also initiate or deepen relationships vital to effective collaborations. The

researcher discovered that questions related to collaborative efforts were often answered with zeal and expressive body language as respondents appeared to feel really strong about the need for partnerships to adequately address generational poverty.

Due to the enormity and complexity of breaking generational poverty, collaborative efforts require a comprehensive integrated approach. Part of this comprehensive approach requires the integration of love, justice, and responsibility. The persons who are agents of love, justice, and responsibility against poverty are citizens and members of faith communities who respond in the roles of helpers, activists, or educators. Helpers engage in hands-on care with the poor. Activists create pressure on those who have political clout to rearrange social policy. Educators explore the world of ideas believing that ideas shape behavior. John Wesley, Dorothy Day, and Martin Luther King Jr. saw the interpersonal relationships created by love and justice-oriented social change. They provide a model for the helper, the educator, and the activist in each of us. John Wesley sought to unite knowledge and vital piety by making the gospel and education available to the poor. Dorothy Day found meaning in extending love to her biological family and showing hospitality to destitute persons and providing education through her Catholic newspaper. Dr. King led the civil rights movement by challenging the powers exerted by racial division through a foundation of love (Couture 4-5, 9-11).

A comprehensive approach to collaboration considers forming partnerships that enhance the implementation of these roles to ensure covering multiple aspects of conquering generational poverty.

To properly deal with the complexity of breaking generational poverty, MCRA should understand the community and city. Eight areas are important to this understanding: 1. Community History, 2. Physical Layout (geographic boundaries; communities "within" the community?), 3) Neighborhood Assets and Resources (strengths, capacities, competitive advantages, past successes?), 4) Indicators of Need, 5) Institutional Elements (organizational and agency services and programs, the perception of these entities, and their long-term plans?), 6) Community Dynamics (neighborhood opinion makers and stakeholders, local "political" dynamics?), 7) Religious Institutions (other congregations, their role and ministry involvement?), and 8) Neighborhood Dynamics (role of neighborhood associations or civic groups, family and friendship networks, hopes, dreams, concerns, and driving themes of life in the community?) (Perkins, Restoring At-Risk Communities: Doing It Together & Doing It Right 221-222). MCRA has already made many of these assessments but needs to formalize its findings.

The participants stated that their entities were motivated by seeing the need, wanting to help but realizing the enormity and complexity was too much for any one entity to handle. This revelation prompted pursing relationships through phone calls, serving on boards or committees, and attending or hosting big events such as training sessions or banquets. The primary motivation was to facilitate opportunities to get to know people, develop trust and determine collaborative potential. Collaborative potential was accessed based on need, complementary services, missional congruency, and integrity. Goals and plans were developed, communicated, and documented. Strategic concerns involved avoiding duplication of effort, missional conflicts, and optimization of

services to the poor. Services of the participants included food sufficiency, educational, career, and interpersonal skill development, housing, and tutoring. Medical services required: collaborations with local hospitals to help get medications or collaborations with medical groups who have volunteer nurse practitioners with surplus medications or samples. Mental health professionals were used to handle undiagnosed and untreated mental health issues. MCRA is engaged with the respondents but this study provides additional information so that the church can expand its collaborations.

Eighth Finding: *Create Relationships with the Marginalized*

The Bible calls Christians to serve the poor (Wheeler 2). Dawn states, "It seems to me that if we eat the body and blood of Christ in expensive churches without care for the hungry, the sacrament is no longer a foretaste of the feast to come, but a trivialized picnic to which not everyone is invited" (Dawn, *Powers, Weakness, and the Tabernacling of God* Ch. 3).

In Matthew 26.11 (NASB), Jesus says, "For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have Me." "This text can be heard to justify anything from indifference and resignation to sustained compassion" (Taylor 25). Wafawanaka uses Deuteronomy 15 to sustained compassion for the poor:

> Jesus' proclamation is a serious and stinging indictment for failure to heed the biblical mandate particularly found in the release laws in Deuteronomy 15. If the biblical mandate is adhered, there would be no generationally poor people among the Israelites. Jesus tells those complaining about the wasted expensive oil poured on His head in preparation for burial that they show kindness to the poor whenever they needed to. ("Is the Biblical

Perspective on Poverty That 'there Shall Be No Poor among You' or 'you Will Always Have the Poor with You'? 107-120).

According to Sugirtharajah, “Jesus’ comment that the poor are always with you comes specifically from Deuteronomy 15:11 relating to the Sabbatical year provisions which provide institutional safeguards against permanent pauperization. The only way to remove the structure of inequality is to give the underprivileged a new beginning-a fresh start in life. Unless there is a collective conversion to solidarity with the marginalized, the poor will continue to be with us” (102-109). “Christians often tolerate the poor among us by taking Jesus’ words out of context; ‘For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me’ (Mark 14.7 NASB). While some might rationalize that they are celebrating the ‘presence of Jesus’ in their midst, they forget that the poor are also always with them, and that they need to attend to them. The Gospels promote feeding the hungry by recounting Jesus’ feeding miracle six times, and on one occasion He admonishes the disciples by saying ‘You give them something to eat’ (Matt. 14.16 NKJV). The gospels also promote feeding the hungry through eschatological parables, warning people that they will be judged if they do not feed the hungry” (Webster 363-373). “Deuteronomy 15.7-11 shows that an openhanded disposition toward the poor is required: “The poor will always be with you in your land, and that is why I command you to be openhanded toward any of your countrymen there who are in poverty and need; Jesus uses this text to expose their insincerity” (Til 441-466). “Also, Jesus’ words in Matthew 26.11 are not the mark of callous indifference to the poor. Jesus artfully connects the cancelling of debts (cf. Deut. 15) with His death at Passover time which will make possible the

cancelling of [humankind's] debt to God, bringing the forgiveness of sin. Sabbatical freedom and Passover redemption surely belong together. Jesus' words about the poor always being with you conveys an expectation for believers to faithfully adhere to the commands in Deuteronomy 15 to ensure that poor people have a fresh start and assistance in achieving a more bountiful life" (Riggans 15-16). These statements support the biblical mandate to empower the poor which necessitates developing relationships with them.

While *End Extreme Poverty: A Moral and Spiritual Imperative by 2030* (refer to Finding #3 Targeting Transforming Generations) is commendable, it might not be holistic enough based on Gutierrez's definition of the three types of liberation. According to Newbigin, Gutierrez calls for: "Political liberation which emphasizes the conflict between oppressor and the oppressed [Amos 5.24 '*Let justice roll down like water. And righteousness like a mighty stream.'*]; Cultural liberation which emphasizes the need for the oppressed to consciously assume responsibility to participate in their own liberation" [Gal. 6.2, 5 '*Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.' 'For each one shall bear his own load.'*] and "Spiritual liberation through Christ—liberation from sin and restoration to fellowship with God" [Rom. 8.2 '*For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death'.*] (Ch. 8). The mandate to end extreme poverty by 2030 ostensibly focuses on political liberation with a nebulous marginal emphasis on cultural liberation and appears silent on the matter of spiritual liberation. Cultural liberation must be addressed because it recognizes that although institutional systems bear the burden of fault for poverty, the poor still must be accountable to responsibly participate in their own liberation. Spiritual liberation must

ground political and cultural liberation because the enormity and complexity of this issue requires divine intervention and sacrificial human effort.

The respondents consistently communicated the need to help the poor transition to self-sufficiency by creating authentic relationships with them. These relationships require the service providers to listen to the poor to properly access their needs. They postulate that to assume what the poor need is oxymoronic to the goal of assisting the poor to ascend to a new level. Therefore, effective communication requires asking the right questions and actively listening so that goals and plans can reflect the aspirations of the individual and not the superimposed agenda of the service provider. Active listening can help the service provider understand the functional roles (supportive or detrimental) of the person's family in their breaking the cycle.

Ministry Implications of the Findings

This study concretizes the enormity, complexity, and urgency of breaking the cycle of poverty. Although many churches and other entities possess some awareness of the situation, there has been both insufficient attention and resources given to help break the poverty cycles of our neighbors. This study presents compelling information and hopefully actionable inspiration for McCabe Roberts Avenue (MCRA) UMC, other churches, entities, and individuals to respond to this tremendous challenge. By exposing the enormity, complexity, and urgency of generational poverty for our community, this study affirms the need for strategically comprehensive, missional, collaborative approaches to help ameliorate this problem.

The second impact is that this study affirms the absolute uncompromising need for authentic relationships with the poor. Authenticity builds community necessary to

know what the real needs are and empower people to participate in their own liberation from poverty. Authenticity is antithetical to the traditional paternalism often conveyed by those who attempt to help the poor. Relationship building with the poor can render understanding of what is needed and how to work toward achieving goals. Relationship building rooted in loving the poor can build trust needed to motivate those who are hopeless and have descended into self-destructive behavior. This study validates the church (MCRA) as agents of love for Christ. This approach increases the possibility and probability of MCRA more fully embodying its working mission statement "changing lives and reshaping futures for Jesus Christ."

The third impact is that relationship building with potential or existing collaborators can ensure the proper delivery of goods and services and reduce duplication of effort or wasted resources. Relationship building with all collaborators develops covenantal relationships which reflect Kingdom principles as well as ensures compliance with legal, moral and contractual obligations.

The fourth impact is that this study confronts the church's tendency to exclusively focus on individual destructive behavior (effects) and ignore systemic institutional barriers (causes). Advocacy and activism are needed to address systemic institutional barriers which fuel generational poverty. Addressing the individual destructive behavior while ignoring the systemic institutional influences fails to address root causes thereby reducing the possibility of making a significant impact on the problem. This perspective does not minimize the challenge of self-destructive behavior or the responsibility of the poor to be accountable but rather ensures that both individual and systemic institutional issues perpetuating this calamity are addressed. Systemic institutional barriers primarily

cover organizational impediments such as governmental/commercial policies, procedures, and practices or complexes such as educational, penal, media which have ubiquitous influence that adversely affects generations. Other systemic institutional entities which are more organic include families, peers, and communities functioning with a duality of cause and effect on an individual's potential for escaping the cycle of poverty. This study gives the church both vocabulary and voice to be heard when advocating for the poor.

Ways that this Study may be used

This study will be used to disciple MCRA's leaders on how to make its existing ministry more meaningful. The researcher will incorporate these findings in MCRA's *Re-Imaging* Conferences. These *Re-Imaging* Conferences are held in the church's fellowship hall and allow the leadership to connect with what God is currently doing and find out how MCRA can align its ministry with the move of the Holy Spirit. MCRA, like many churches, has operated on an antiquated paradigm that no longer works in this age. MCRA seeks to change its methods but not its message. The productivity of these conferences relies on advanced prayer with prayer journals and sessions with authentic dialogue about what we are doing and how MRCA can be more faithful. The results of this project will help MCRA update its methods, approaches, and expected outcomes of doing ministry with the generationally poor and collaborators.

The results will also be shared with some of MCRA's existing collaborators particularly those who participated in this study. This sharing will expand the mutual understanding and hopefully increase both the effectiveness and efficiency in service delivery. The study will also inform the practice of ministry in various ways including:

1. Assessments of Community and City

   -To properly develop a ministry to break generational poverty in its context, MCRA should understand the community and city.

2. Spiritual Formation and Discipleship

   -Emphasis will be vision based by petitioning God for human and financial resources. The leaders will also seek divine guidance on how to ensure that MCRA enhances its spiritual formation and discipleship with the poor. Part of the discernment will involve how to share the love and light of Jesus Christ without coercion (real or perceived) as a condition for receiving help. Leadership will be called upon to recruit others to actively participate in and commit to Sunday morning Prayer Power. These prayers will help guide the Re-Imaging brainstorming on how to most effectively re-establish a more meaningful collaboration with the Food Bank and incorporate spiritual formation and discipleship as a component to help the poor with food insufficiency.

3. Casting a Compelling Vision

   -The researcher will continue casting a compelling vision but with more intentionality on breaking the generational poverty. Helping to grow the congregation's faithful giving will be a weekly emphasis imploring creativity, lay leadership, and the young.

4. Strengthen Relationships

   -Existing collaborations can be strengthened based on the results of this project. MCRA primarily collaborates with area schools, Community

Coalition, Food Bank, Inspire, Encourage and Achieve (IEA), Growing Community, Inc. (GCI), and Episcopal Health Alliance.

5. Advocacy and Activism

-MCRA's mission field is located in an area that suffers from ecological classism based on four problem areas: 1. Noise Pollution (constantly excessive train noise), 2. Poor Water Quality, 3. Poor Air Quality, and 4. Poor Road Infrastructure. Other more affluent neighborhoods do not suffer from these same challenges. These conditions adversely affect the quality of life in this mission field. The researcher has publicly and privately approached the Mayor and City Council about these issues and they have given verbal ascent to the severity and disparities represented by these issues. However, the progress has been negligible. One official privately contended that more action can occur if a large group of people confronts City Hall. MCRA will seek community support through Neighborhood Associations and other leaders to formalize a comprehensive coordinated strategy to secure urgent proactivity from the City. Many Associations have complained but not strategically approached those in power.

Limitations of the Study

For Research Question #2, one of the initial participants was no longer affiliated with the church. Thereafter, the Senior Pastor proposed another leader to provide responses to the semi-structured interview. The replacement's ministry responsibilities related more to the spiritual formation and discipleship aspect of helping people break the poverty cycle. The initial participant's responsibilities related more to service delivery.

The researcher is very satisfied with the replacement's responses which have been invaluable to the research, yet wonders if and how different the findings would have been had there not been a switch.

By focusing on MCRA, this study may not be well generalized to all churches because of differences in missional orientation, congregational and community demographics, worldviews, theological and ecclesiological perspectives, and polity.

If I were to conduct this same study again, I would have found out what the Internal Review Board's (IRB) availability was so that I could receive a prompt response. Without knowing it, I submitted my application during their well-deserved break time. This caused an excessive delay in obtaining my approval. Closely related to this matter is that I might not have devoted all my energies to completing Chapter 3 before I finished the IRB application. While the IRB application relies on decisions made and included in Chapter 3, I could have made those decisions and completed the application before finalizing Chapter 3.

Using open-ended questions for both the focus group and semi-structured interviews provided information rich responses vital to qualitative research. Therefore, the instrumentation was adequate for this pre-intervention project.

One supporting question for Research Questions 1 and 2 related to systemic institutional barriers and the other supporting question related to individual destructive behavior. Because the church often focuses exclusively on impacting individual destructive behavior, it was sometimes difficult to get a response on systemic institutional barriers. The researcher often struggled to make sure that the respondents understood the concept of systemic institutional barriers in contrast to individual destructive barriers.

The researcher sensed that this lack of understanding related, in part, to the churches' inclination to individual relief to the exclusion of institutional change. This inclination tends to view the cause of generational poverty as both an individual's fault and responsibility. This view fails to properly identify systemic institutional barriers as probable causes manifested in destructive behavior (effects). The universal church's approach fails to address root causes perhaps because the Western American culture tends to value individualism. Therefore, poverty is viewed as a failure of the individual to pursue the good life or an ineptitude in winning at the game of life.

Unexpected Observations

One of the respondents who works with the poor, and also escaped generational poverty, had a negative view of the work ethic of many poor people. The researcher was initially surprised when the respondent expressed a strong opinion about how lazy some people were. When people who have had traumatic experiences tend to be 'hardened,' the researcher often wonder why. I surmised that perhaps the thought is "since I worked hard to get out so can you" and therefore those who do not or who struggle to get motivated must be lazy. I also thought that sometimes that those who escape poverty might protect themselves by assuming a strident posture to preclude ever slipping back. Nevertheless, I did finally perceive that the respondent's perceptions were more about challenging people to do better and did not reflect a condescending attitude about those still caught in the cycle.

Recommendations

- Ministry contexts can benefit from formally accessing the church and community to gain an understanding of and appreciation for the history,

physical layout, resources, relationships, and need. These studies should also consider both formal and informal centers of power.

- Develop an authentic community within the church context and share that authenticity in the mission field. To the extent possible, become immersed in the mission field. Authenticity works well especially with the young who are key to breaking the cycle of poverty. Authenticity is a manner of being honest and even vulnerable; it does not require the same transparency shared in our most intimate relationships but it translates to "being real." Jesus was always authentic even though His level of transparency was gauged by the nature of the relationship.
- The church must ground its efforts in divine surrender, which comes through the Word and the Spirit. The spiritual disciplines (prayer, fasting, bible study, worship, sacraments) must be central to believers' private and communal lives. As Christians are led by His Word and Spirit, they must minister with the poor so that the poor may experience the love of Jesus and see the light of Christ.
- Investigate the possible utility of creating an IRS 501 (c)(3) not-for-profit corporation to expand sources of financial support. Many businesses will not give directly to a church but will give to a separate not-for-profit.
- Pastors should cast a compelling vision that transforms the congregation to move beyond merely "feeling good" about helping the poor to a deeper appreciation that the Holy Spirit is at work in God's church, too. A compelling vision is biblically sound particularly in its prophetic

hermeneutics. Pastors must be intentionally prophetic rather than political, nationalistic, or ethnocentric. Being prophetic calls us to be as concerned about the poor, widow, orphans and strangers (immigrants) as the bible mandates.

Postscript

The dissertation's chapter format served as a metaphor for a deeper understanding of both my professional and personal life.

- Chapter One's design allowed me to share my story and what inspired me to pursue this project. In life, the starting point and most crucial part of one's life is one's story. Each of us has a unique story even people with the same name, twins, or siblings. Story is foundational to understanding who I am and whose I am; as I journey through life, my story morphs. Understanding one's story is not only crucial to a great beginning but it is a continual process fueled by the other significant parts identified in the succeeding chapters.
- Chapter Two's design allowed me to explore what God says and what other voices and vocabulary are necessary to explain the project. In Chapter Two, God's Word and these identified voices and vocabulary were in dialogue to provide deeper insights. In my own life, I daily seek God for insights into my journey and I supplement this understanding with other human and non-human sources. Some of the other sources might be experience, reason, or tradition ('Wesleyan Quadrilateral') loosely described as how I appropriate life. Just as the resources in Chapter Two were in dialogue, I find myself in an

internal dialogue on how I proceed in writing my story for this journey called life.

- Chapter Three's design allowed me to propose a research project methodology to gain deeper ministry insights and possibilities. Similarly, in writing my own story, I develop plans to further advance the vision and mission that I have received from God for my life and ministry. This project plan needed to be approved by my Coach and Internal Review Board (IRB). While the analogy is imperfect for no one compares to God, in life I seek to have my plans approved and led by the Holy Spirit which might also include wise human counsel.
- Chapter Four's design allowed me to implement the research plan and describe as well as summarize the major findings. In implementing my life plans, I describe what I experience and summarize my perceptions in self talk and with others. I do realize that in life, I have fewer internal controls to ensure objectivity and avoid bias; therefore, this analogy as the others is imperfect but still conveys a growth experienced from this project.
- Chapter Five's design allowed me to give voice to my own understanding, limitations, and intended application of the findings. In life, after listening to other voices, I synthesized everything through the lens of my own story. Hopefully, as in the project, I gleaned things that make my story a blessing to God, others and even His Creation.

The project itself gave me important insights. "Breaking Generational Poverty through Collaborative Efforts" reinforced that the enormity and complexity of life

requires that I continue to be in and cultivate authentic community. As a Pastor, I need the triune God to lead, guide, and empower me, and I need people to provide leadership and follow. In my personal life, I need the same-God and people. And in these relationships, authenticity provides greater intimacy and trust. Constant communication with God through the spiritual disciplines is vital to intimacy and my growing to trust God more; fully trusting God more is an evolving process for me (John Wesley calls it sanctifying grace). This means that when I worry or fear, it reflects a lack or limited trust in the Sovereignty of God. Constant communication that is clear, honest, and vulnerable strengthens relationships. Too often, there is a perception that people need to be strong and not weak. I believe a better perception is that people need to be strong yet vulnerable which is the message of the cross. This type of relationship building works particularly well with the young who are crucial to breaking generational poverty and to building God's Kingdom. Through this project and my entire Asbury Theological Seminary Beeson experience, I have matured and handle vulnerability by doing something that appears to be oxymoronic: I hide behind the cross while sharing my authentic self with God and humanity.

APPENDIX

Consent Form Template

Introduction: My name is Rodney L. Graves. I am a student at Asbury Theological Seminary conducting a Doctor of Ministry study. My telephone number is _____ _____. My dissertation coach is Dr. Anne Gatobu and her phone number is _____. You may contact either of us at any time if you have questions about this **s**tudy.

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to study collaborative potential of McCabe Roberts Avenue (MCRA) in helping to break generational poverty in Beaumont, Texas.

Procedure: If you consent to participate in this research, you will be asked several questions in focus group or an oral interview. The focus group or oral interview will take place_____.

I will make a digital recording of the oral interview/focus group to assist in my analysis of the data.

Time required: The initial interview/focus group session will take approximately 1-2 hours of your time. Follow-up focus group sessions/interviews (one or two) of 30-45 minutes may be needed.

Voluntary participation: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may still refuse to answer any question that you do not wish to answer. You may also withdraw from the study at any time.

Risks: There are minimal risks in this study.

Benefits: While there is no guaranteed benefit, it is possible that you will enjoy sharing your answers to these questions or that you will find the conversation meaningful. This

study is intended to benefit individuals or entities including but not limited to churches who desire to help break generational poverty through collaborative efforts.

Confidentiality: The use of your real name for the Semi-Structured Interviews is completely your choice. However, I will gladly use a pseudonym if you desire. Please initial your desire which can be changed at any time prior to the publication of this study:

_____ I freely give you the right to use my real name in this study.

_____ I prefer to use a pseudonym and you can choose it.

_____ I prefer to use a pseudonym and have chosen to use _____.

The researcher will maintain confidentiality and will encourage other participants to maintain confidentiality, but cannot guarantee it.

Sharing the results: I plan to conduct this study and present the findings based on the **i**nterviews together with my reading. The study will be submitted to my Dissertation Coach Dr. Anne Gatobu for review and input. After the study is finalized, I plan to share what I learned from this study with McCabe Roberts Avenue (MCRA) UMC, those who participate in this study, and appropriate Asbury Theological Seminary representatives.

Publication: There is the possibility that I will publish this study or refer to it in published writing in the future. In this event, I will honor our confidentiality agreement as prescribed in this document.

Before you sign: By signing below, you are agreeing to an audiotaped interview for this research study. For all participants be sure that any questions you may have are answered to your satisfaction. If you agree to participate in this study, a copy of this

signed document with be given to you.

Participant's signature_____ **Date:** _____

Print name: _____

Researcher's signature_____ **Date:** _____

Print name: _____

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