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INVISIBLE POVERTY:
AWARENESS, ATTITUDES, AND ACTION

by

JOSEPH W. JOHNSON

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Luther Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment of

The Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

2020

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ABSTRACT

*Invisible Poverty:
Awareness, Attitudes, and Actions*

by

Joseph Johnson

In small-town rural America, we do not tend to see poverty. Poverty is relatively invisible, especially among our youth and children. *Invisible Poverty* explores the issues, challenges, stereotypes, and causes of small-town rural poverty while presenting possible solutions. Drawing from Alvin Luedke, Craig Van Gelder, Alan Roxburgh, Patrick Keifert, Cynthia Duncan, and Shannon Jung, *Invisible Poverty* presents a missional theology of accompaniment seeking justice and avoiding shame. In an effort to understand the complexity of rural poverty, *Invisible Poverty* asks; *How might Action Research interventions affect awareness, attitudes, and actions of the congregation concerning the issues of poverty?*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Throughout this study I have prayed and discerned what the title of this thesis should be. I considered *Silent Poverty*, *Hidden Poverty*, *Small-town Poverty*, *Rural Small-town Poverty*, or *Invisible Poverty*. As I discerned these titles, I was introduced to Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man*. The novel was published originally in 1952 addressing many of the social and intellectual issues facing African Americans in the early twentieth century. The nameless narrator says, "I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me . . . When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination—indeed, everything and anything except me."¹ Upon reading this, I knew I had my title, *Invisible Poverty*.

The process of researching and writing *Invisible Poverty* has been an amazing experience. I would like to acknowledge all people who have experienced issues of poverty including hunger, food insecurity, homelessness, housing instability, discrimination, injustice, shame, exclusion, addiction, health problems, or anyone who has felt socially invisible. In this project the voice of poverty has been heard. What had been overlooked is now visible. I would like to say thank you to the four interviewees who had experienced poverty who were willing to share their story for the sake of better serving those who are suffering.

¹ Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 2nd Vintage International ed (New York: Vintage International, 1995), 3.

I would also like to thank my wife Amanda and our kids, Wyatt and Charlie. Participating in the Doctor of Ministry program in Congregational Mission and Leadership would not have been possible without your support. I hope I can reciprocate your love and support. Thank you to my parents and brother for a lifetime of lessons about integrity, character, love, and service. Thank you to the congregation and community in which this research was conducted and the good work you continue to do to love and serve all people. Thank you to my research team for the support and care for those who have been marginalized. Thank you to my friends, family, pastors, and teachers who have encouraged me in ministry and education. Thank you to the professors of Congregational Mission and Leadership at Luther Seminary; Dr. Dwight Zscheile, Dr. Michael Binder, Dr. David Hahn, Dr. Terri Elton, Dr. Steve Thomason, Dr. Daniel Anderson, and Dr. Alvin Luedke. Thank you to the members of this CML cohort; Luther S. Allen III, Pamela Morolla, Andrew Schlecht, Tormod Svensson, and Abenda Tamba. I am blessed to be in this journey of faith with you.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AR	Action Research
CML	Congregational Mission and Leadership
ELCA	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
FC	Focus Group
IP	Interview Participants
IRB	Institutional Review Board
LGBTQ+	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer Plus
LW	Luther's Works
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
RT	Research Team
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
STaR	Small-town and Rural
U.S.	United States
WELCA	Women of the ELCA
WIC	Women, Infants, and Children

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In our small-town rural¹ context, we do not tend to see poverty.² We do not tend to see people holding a cardboard sign on the street corner. We do not tend to have people stealing food from dumpsters. That does not mean we do not have an issue with poverty. We do. The poverty, however, is much less visible. Homelessness tends to be people sleeping on a relative's couch or basement. Hunger tends to be food insecurity.³ Poverty is relatively invisible, especially among our youth and children. The issue of poverty among youth was brought to my attention when I asked a high school student who had not been to church for a few months how she was doing and she responded, "It's been a long winter." When I asked her why she said, "Dad hasn't been working and we don't have enough food in the house." This came as a surprise to me. When I talked to a few other congregational leaders, they too were surprised. As I looked

¹ Chapter 2 describes the challenges of defining "rural" with factors including: population, geography, housing, and economy. The focus of this project was not to define who is or is not rural. The focus of this project is to identify the issues of poverty and determine how Action Research interventions affect awareness, attitudes, and actions of the congregation concerning the issues of poverty.

² "Business Directory Definition," <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/poverty.html> (accessed August 20, 2018). The Business Directory defines poverty as the condition where people's basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter are not being met.

³ "Definition of FOOD INSECURE," <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/food+insecure> (accessed October 11, 2018). Unable to consistently access or afford adequate food. According to data released by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 17 percent of Americans—more than 50 million people—live in households that are "food insecure," a term that means a family sometimes runs out of money to buy food, or it sometimes runs out of food before it can get more money. A food-insecure household may be faced with the difficult choice of paying for basic necessities, such as health care and housing, or buying nutritionally adequate foods.

closer at our community, I realized this was not an isolated incident and has led me to more conversations with youth, congregational leaders, and community leaders. Through these conversations I have recognized a problem does exist and remains relatively unrecognized. This realization has led me to this research question: *How might Action Research interventions affect awareness, attitudes, and actions of the congregation concerning the issues of poverty?*

This project explored what God was already doing in the community and explored new possibilities of engagement to build relationships that provide care while avoiding shame. The intent of this project was not only to raise awareness, but also to join God in the neighborhood⁴ by engaging practices to ensure that all people have the essentials of life including food, clothing, and shelter. The intent was to embody a missional theology of accompaniment⁵ and explore possible relationships with local and regional partners including the school districts, county public health, social services, local food pantry, regional food bank, and area rescue missions.

⁴ Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*, Allelon Missional Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011).

⁵ “Accompaniment” is a scriptural and practical way of understanding mission that has been articulated in the past few decades in dialogue between churches in the “global North”—the churches who historically sent missionaries—and churches in the “global South”—churches in Asia, Africa, and Latin America who historically received missionaries. Today, there are more Christians in the “global South” than in the “global North.” It is a different world than that of the earliest missionaries, and our understanding of and living out mission must respond. We see that mission is a journey, and that this journey, taken with many companions, shows us the unexpected and sometimes unrecognized Christ who walks with us. In this journey, as we break bread together, we move toward Christ’s mission of reconciliation between us and God, between us and one another.

This Action Research⁶ project was conducted through Community Lutheran Church in Hill Town.⁷ The city of Hill Town is located on the interstate corridor between two of the three largest cities in the state. This is the heart of some of the richest farming soil in the world. An agricultural processing company has a factory four miles north of town and employs 330 fulltime employees and about 1500 temps. The local economy is driven by agriculture, but given our location between two large cities, Hill Town also serves as a bedroom community for commuters. Hill Town is approximately 90 miles from a popular vacation and recreation destination often referred to as “lakes country,” “the lake,” or “the cabin.”

The population of Hill Town is 2,230.⁸ Hill Town has more than sixty-five businesses, a 24/7 fitness center, a swimming pool, a golf course, an ice skating rink with log cabin warming house, organized youth athletics and activities, a skate park, a senior citizens center, a local newspaper, a volunteer fire department and ambulance service, curbside recycling, a medical center including clinic, nursing home, emergency room, hospital, a “milk-man” that delivers dairy products to your refrigerator, and a local gas

⁶ Davydd J. Greenwood and Morten Levin, *Introduction to Action Research: Social Research for Social Change*, 2nd ed (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), 3. Action Research (AR) is social research carried out by a team that encompasses a professional action researcher and the members of an organization, community, or network (stakeholders) who are seeking to improve the participants’ situation. AR promotes broad participation in the research process and supports action leading to a more just, sustainable, or satisfying situation for the stakeholders.

⁷ Pseudonyms are used to protect the subjects of this study. Community Lutheran Church is a pseudonym for the research site. Hill Town is a pseudonym for the town. The names of focus group participants, interviewees, and AR team members have been changed. While every effort has been made to ensure confidentiality, participants were advised that anonymity could not be guaranteed.

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, “American FactFinder - Results,” <http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF> (accessed August 24, 2016).

station that will pick up your vehicle for an oil change and drop off the vehicle when they are finished. This community has some utopian characteristics.

The city's geographical location originated because of its location on the railroad line. The downtown area is located alongside the railroad tracks. Although the railroad continues to be a lifeline of Hill Town, the interstate provides the majority of the commerce. Community Lutheran Church is located by the intersection of the two busiest streets in Hill Town. The church building is at the center of the community both literally and figuratively.

According to the 2010 census, of the 2,230 people living in Hill Town, 2080 are White (93.3%), 96 are Hispanic or Latino (4.3%), 23 are American Indian or Alaska Native (1.0%), 19 are two or more races (0.9%), 10 are Asian (0.4%), 1 is Black or African American (0.0%), and 1 is some other race (0.0%).⁹ The socioeconomic status in this context varies greatly depending upon racial/ethnic/cultural makeup. In 2017, the median household income of all residents in Hill Town is \$42,961. The median household income for White residents is \$44,324, and is \$45,210 for Hispanic and Latino. These incomes are substantially higher than American Indian and Alaska Native at \$21,128, and Multi-race at \$21,007.¹⁰

Community Lutheran Church registered 1,349 members in 2006. By 2020, the congregation grew to 1,543 members (+14.38%). In 2006, Community Lutheran received \$243,531.77 in total income. In 2019, the congregation received \$365,025.47 in total

⁹ 2010 U.S. Census Bureau, "American FactFinder - Results," <http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF> (accessed August 24, 2016).

¹⁰ "Statewide Income Map, Earnings Map, and Wages Data," <http://www.city-data.com/income/income-Hillsboro-North-Dakota.html> (accessed August 24, 2016).

income (+49.89%). The racial makeup of the congregation is also similar to the community. Of the 1,521 members, 1,499 are White (98.6%), 11 are Hispanic and Latino (0.6%), and 11 are mixed race (0.6%). Although the racial makeup is quite homogeneous, the socioeconomic makeup is quite diverse. Hill Town is primarily a farming community, so the farm economy affects us personally and professionally. Local economy directly correlates with farming. Low commodity prices affect our farmers, agribusinesses, supporting businesses, and residents. Second, third, and fourth generation farmers tend to be capital rich with disposable income and tend to be the top tier of income. Laborers such as farm managers, hired hands, agronomists, and agricultural processing factory workers earn comparable compensation to teachers and other local professionals. Employees of the corporate and co-op retail and service industry (Burger King, Subway, Cenex gas station and convenience store, Casey's gas station and convenience store, and local bars) tend to earn less than the median household income.

Introduction to Research

This project was done using Action Research in which I conducted quantitative research using a census baseline questionnaire and end line questionnaire. I extended an invitation to all people 18 years old and older in worship on Sunday morning to participate in a survey to evaluate awareness, attitudes, and actions of the congregation concerning poverty in our small-town rural context. An implied consent form was used for the survey (see appendix C). The questionnaire was administered via Survey

Monkey.¹¹ People were able to participate with their own device and we had computer stations set up with my Action Research Team assisting at the computer stations. We also had hard copies of the questionnaires available for anyone who preferred a hard copy over the online version. I entered the hard copy data into Survey Monkey manually. I used the recruiting statement, “You are invited to participate in a research project to evaluate general awareness, attitudes, and actions of the congregation concerning poverty.”

I conducted qualitative research by having interviews with four willing participants by purposive/informed sampling who had experienced or were experiencing poverty with at least one youth or child in the household. I selected parents and/or guardians who are 18 years old and older. I chose to not interview youth because of the sensitivity of the subject matter and I did not want the youth to feel exploited in any way. I selected these participants based on prior conversations initiated by the subject. I used the recruiting statement, “We have already had conversation about the difficulty of finances and resources for parents or guardians supporting a child or children in this community. I am doing research and writing my doctoral thesis on this subject. Are you willing to have a conversation about your experience to help shape our congregation’s awareness, attitudes, and actions?” An informed consent form was used for the interviews (see appendix C).

The four interventions used in this research included (1) a newsletter article, (2) a sermon, (3) Bible study, and (4) a service project. Each intervention was followed up

¹¹ “SurveyMonkey,” <https://www.surveymonkey.com/> (accessed September 17, 2018). Survey Monkey is an online survey development software that allows users to create and send surveys, collect and store data, and produce reports.

with a focus group. An informed consent form was used for the focus groups (see appendix C). I used the research invitation, “Because I value your experience and your voice, and because I would like to be able to best serve and help people in this community, I would like to have your consent to use this conversation in my research.” To insure the subject understood what he/she had been asked to do I asked clarifying questions: Do you have any questions? Do you have any concerns? I read both verbal and nonverbal indicators of understanding and cooperation.

The independent variables are the four interventions themselves. The dependent variables measured were the awareness, attitudes, and actions of the congregation concerning poverty. Intervening variables included pride or reluctance to admit or recognize the issues of local poverty. Another intervening variable was the work the congregation, community, and/or individuals had already participated in concerning poverty. A third intervening variable was an unusual amount of snowfall and cold temperatures in Hill Town that caused a rescheduling of the events including the sermon intervention. On the morning the sermon intervention was scheduled we experienced blizzard like conditions that effected our attendance. I postponed the intervention until the next week and had good attendance. The service project was also rescheduled because of weather. Other intervening variables included age, gender, income level, ethnicity, longevity of residency, attendance in worship, and willingness to participate in a survey.

This project was conducted according to Institutional Review Board standards of Luther Seminary. This project included survey/interview procedures and secondary use of data from the U.S. Census Bureau. Ethical concerns included using purposive/informed sampling acknowledging I had prior knowledge of people's

experience. I interviewed four subjects who had experienced some form of poverty. I chose to do this because this study concerned people living in poverty and I believe it was important to hear and include their voice and story. Informed consent forms were used for the interviews (see appendix C). Another ethical concern was that I asked congregation members to report a category of income and assets. This was to help determine if there is any relationship between income/asset level and awareness, attitudes, and actions concerning poverty. Participants could choose to not answer any or all of the questions. Implied consent forms were used for the surveys (see appendix C).

Measures to maintain confidentiality of the information obtained from subject included the following: remove face sheets containing identifiers (e.g., names and addresses) from survey instruments; properly dispose of, destroy, or delete study data/documents after three years; limit access to identifiable information; securely store data documents within locked locations; and assign security codes to computerized records. The researcher and two advisors have the only access to raw data before the use of pseudonyms.

Definition of Terms

While some of the key terms used in this project are commonly known, some of these terms have a theological meaning that differs from the secular meaning. The definition of terms adds clarity and possible semantic differences. Some of the key terms of this project include rural poverty, invisible poverty, food insecurity, housing instability, shame, praxis, accompaniment, justice, and identity.

Rural Poverty

While there are numerous ways to define poverty, the working definition for this project is the “condition where people's basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter are not being met.”¹² Chapter 2 describes the challenges of defining rural with factors including: population, geography, housing, and economy. The focus of this project was not to define who is or is not rural. The focus of this project is to identify the issues of poverty and determine how Action Research interventions affect awareness, attitudes, and actions of the congregation concerning the issues of poverty.

Invisible Poverty

Ralph Ellison’s novel *Invisible Man* was published originally in 1952 addressing many of the social and intellectual issues facing African Americans in the early twentieth century. The nameless narrator says, “I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me . . . When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination—indeed, everything and anything except me.”¹³ Many of the social and intellectual issues facing African Americans in the early twentieth century continue today. They are very real, and yet many people refuse to see them. Likewise, issues of poverty are very real, and yet many people refuse to see them. *Invisible Poverty* refers to issues of poverty including hunger, food insecurity, homelessness, housing instability, discrimination, injustice, shame, exclusion, addiction, and health problems that have remained socially invisible.

¹² “Business Dictionary Definition,” BusinessDictionary.com, <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/poverty.html> (accessed August 20, 2018).

¹³ Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 3.

Food Insecurity

In our small-town rural context, we do not tend to see people holding a cardboard sign on the street corner. We do not tend to have people stealing food from dumpsters. The issues with hunger do not tend to be about starvation. Our issues with hunger tend to be about food insecurity. Food insecurity is defined as “unable to consistently access or afford adequate food.”¹⁴ Many people living in poverty are faced with a decision between paying for food and paying for other essentials of life including housing, clothing, or medical care. The cycle of food insecurity, housing instability, and chronic disease begins when an individual or family cannot afford nutritious food. Health worsens. Time and money are needed to respond to health conditions leaving little money for housing and adequate nutrition. This causes the cycle to continue worsening existing conditions and making improvement extremely difficult.

Housing Instability

Some of the stereotypes of homelessness include people living under bridges, in cardboard boxes, on the streets, or sleeping on park benches. While these images of homelessness are a reality in many places, in our small-town rural context homelessness tends to be in the form of housing instability. Housing instability tends to be people sleeping on a relative’s couch or basement. Although housing costs are generally lower in small-town rural communities, higher poverty rates and lower incomes create serious challenges concerning affordable housing. Housing for low-income families in rural areas tends to be too expensive, poor quality, unavailable, or inaccessible. While it is generally

¹⁴ *Merriam-Webster*, accessed October 11, 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/food+insecure>.

recommended that families should not spend more than 30% of their income on housing, the Housing Assistance Council reports that nearly half of rural renters are paying more than 50% of their income on housing.¹⁵ This financial strain on an individual or family often makes securing and maintaining affordable housing incredibly difficult. Housing instability refers to those who have shelter but are unable to sustain their housing situation.

Shame

Shame has the power to tear at our self-esteem and our self-worth. Shame causes us to be silent. Shame has some fundamental characteristics similar to guilt yet is distinct from guilt. “It’s an important distinction. Researchers define it this way: Shame means ‘I am bad.’ Guilt means ‘I did something bad.’” Shame is not simply a feeling. I argue that shame is deeper than a feeling and reaches the very core of our self-image and identity. For this project, the working definition of shame is a condition caused by the belief that one is, or is perceived by others to be, inferior, unworthy, or inadequate.

Praxis

Praxis is the process in which something is done or applied. Praxis is “an action or practice such as an exercise or practice of an art, science, or skill. A practical application of a theory.”¹⁶ The aim of Action Research is for change and transformation to happen. This project is about more than theory. It is about practical application of the theory. The

¹⁵ “Rental Housing in Rural America - Housing Assistance Council,” <http://www.ruralhome.org/sct-information/mn-hac-research/rural-rrb/654-rrn-rural-rental-housing> (accessed April 22, 2020).

¹⁶ *Merriam-Webster*, accessed September 18, 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/praxis>.

model of praxis presented in chapter 2 has provided a framework for this project but also provides a framework for continued praxis beyond the timeline of this project.

Accompaniment

In 1999 the ELCA adopted a missional theology of accompaniment in “Global Mission in the Twenty-First Century: A Vision of Evangelical Faithfulness in God’s Mission.” Missional accompaniment is defined as “walking together in a solidarity that practices interdependence and mutuality.”¹⁷ The principles of accompaniment include:

- Mutually: All of us have gifts to support God’s mission. There is no mission to, only mission with and among.
- Inclusively: We seek to build relationships across boundaries that exclude and divide.
- Vulnerably: Just as Jesus became vulnerable to us, we open ourselves to others.
- Empowering: We seek to identify and correct imbalances of power, which may mean recognizing and letting go of our own.
- Sustainably: To ensure local ministries last for a long time, we seek to embed mission in ongoing relationships and communities.¹⁸

Justice

Civil justice is defined as: “the assignment of merited rewards or punishments; the establishment or determination of rights according to the rules of law or equity, a system of justice; the quality of being just, impartial, or fair questioned the justice of the their decision; or the conformity to truth, fact, or reason.”¹⁹ *Invisible Poverty* makes a distinction between civil justice and divine justice. Drawing from Michael Welker, this

¹⁷ ELCA, “Global Mission.”

¹⁸ ELCA, “Global Mission.”

¹⁹ “Merriam-Webster,” accessed January 24, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/justice>.

project presents God's justice as the crossroads of justice, mercy, and knowledge of God.²⁰ Matthew 25 recognizes that with divine justice all people are to be fed. I was hungry and you gave me food. All people are to have clean water. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. All people are to be welcomed. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. All people are to be clothed. I was naked and you gave me clothing. All people are to be cared for. I was sick and you took care of me. All people are to be visited. I was in prison and you visited me. Divine justice is not about rewards or punishments. It is about forgiveness. It is not about fair and balanced. It is about grace. It is not about the administration of the law. It is about the administration of the gospel. Civil justice is defined as the assignment of merited rewards or punishments. Divine justice is defined as the assignment of hope, peace, compassion, grace, mercy, forgiveness, love, comfort, strength, life, and salvation.

Identity

The identity of an individual is a web of complex factors including physical appearance, personality, hobbies, mental ability, gender, family, class, religion, culture, occupation, history, and nationality. Factors of congregational identity are equally as complex. *Invisible Poverty* looks through a theological lens of congregational identity asking who are we and what are we doing here? Identity in this context is not about individual identity. Identity in this context is about congregational identity.

²⁰ Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*, 1st English-language ed (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 46–47.

Chapter 1 has introduced the research question and design and defined key terms. Chapter 2 explains the theoretical lenses that gave shape and informed this research project including Rural Poverty, Small-town Mentality, Shame, and Praxis. Chapter 3 explores the biblical and theological lenses that gave shape and informed this research project. The biblical lenses include Matthew 25 *I Was Hungry*, Romans 3 *Without Distinction*, John 6 *The Bread of Life*, and Luke 24 *The Road to Emmaus*. The theological lenses include Accompaniment, Free to Be, Justice, and Identity. Chapter 4 expounds on the research design and methodology introduced in this chapter. Chapter 5 presents the research results and interpretation. Chapter 6 explains the conclusions with theoretical and theological reflection.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL LENSES

Chapter 1 gave an introduction to the research design and project. Chapter 2 takes a closer look at the theoretical lenses that led me to the research question: *How might Action Research interventions affect awareness, attitudes, and actions of the congregation concerning the issues of poverty?* The theoretical lenses include Rural Poverty, Small-town Mentality, Shame, and Praxis.

Theoretical Lens: Rural Poverty

One of the challenges of engaging the issue of poverty concerns the definition. Following the Office of Management and Budget's Statistical Policy Directive 14, the "Census Bureau uses a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to determine who is in poverty. If a family's total income is less than the family's threshold, then that family and every individual in it is considered in poverty."¹ Merriam-Webster defines poverty as "the state of one who lacks a usual or socially acceptable amount of money or material possessions."² While these definitions are

¹ U.S. Census U.S. Census Bureau, "American FactFinder - Results," <http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF> (accessed August 24, 2016).

² *Merriam-Webster*, accessed August 20, 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/poverty>.

helpful, the working definition for this project is poverty as the “Condition where people's basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter are not being met.”³

The focus of this project is specific to small-town rural poverty. According to Cynthia Duncan’s *Rural Poverty in America*, over nine million people in the United States live in rural poverty.⁴ This population, according to Duncan, has generally been overlooked even when considerable attention is directed to urban poverty. While we have a working definition of poverty, defining rural is perhaps a bit more challenging. The Census Bureau had adopted a pre-2000 official definition identifying incorporated cities and towns with at least 2,500 people as urban. Towns and territories with less than 2,500 people are considered rural.⁵ For the 2010 Census, “To qualify as an urban area, the territory identified according to criteria must encompass at least 2,500 people, at least 1,500 of which reside outside institutional group quarters . . . ‘Rural’ encompasses all population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area.”⁶ Merriam-Webster defines rural as “of or relating to the country, country people or life, or agriculture.”⁷ Denominations also offer varying definitions of small-town and rural. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), with which Community Lutheran is affiliated, uses the term “STaR” to refer to Small-town and Rural ministries. The ELCA does not have a

³ “Business Directory Definition,” BusinessDictionary.com, <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/poverty.html> (accessed August 20, 2018).

⁴ Cynthia M. Duncan, ed., *Rural Poverty in America* (New York: Auburn House, 1992), 4.

⁵ Michael Ratcliffe et al., “Defining Rural at the U.S. Census Bureau,” ND, 8.

⁶ US Census Bureau Geography, “2010 Census Urban and Rural Classification and Urban Area Criteria,” accessed October 11, 2018, <https://www.census.gov/geo/reference/ua/urban-rural-2010.html> <https://www.census.gov/geo/reference/ua/urban-rural-2010.html>.

⁷ *Merriam-Webster*, accessed September 18, 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rural>.

population requirement and allows congregations to self-identify as small-town and rural. The focus of this project is specific to the Midwest community of Hill Town which meets the criteria of all of these definitions. I use small-town and rural interchangeably.

The nature of rural economy is changing and has become an emerging issue in rural America. Whereas the rural community of a few decades ago was characterized by family owned and operated farms and ranches, the changing structure of agriculture has shifted to a significantly different production and marketing system that is highly “centralized, monopolistic, corporate-controlled system . . . The differences between these two kinds of food systems are stark. The consequences, both intended and the unintended ones, that changing to this globalized system is having for rural families and their communities can hardly be overstated.”⁸ According to Jung, et al, many small-town rural communities are experiencing a rural crisis. The manifestation of this change has been “a lack of employment opportunities or of good employment opportunities; poor housing; high poverty rates; relatively high illiteracy; and low levels of education.”⁹ This shift in the rural economic paradigm has had substantial impact on small-town communities, individuals, and families. “There are many rural locations where living standards have declined; in fact the depth of poverty and its attendant stress are still undocumented. There are very real costs attached to what is happening in these locations—social, family, spiritual, and emotional suffering often accompany economic loss.”¹⁰

⁸ L. Shannon Jung, et al., *Rural Ministry: The Shape of the Renewal to Come* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 104.

⁹ Jung, et al. 107.

¹⁰ Jung, et al. 107.

While the impact of this paradigm shift is still not entirely known, we do know the face of rural and small-town living is changing. These changes include;

- Changing demographics
Growing Hispanic population, Aging population, Outflow of young adults-Inflow of older adults, Birth rates declining
- Health issues
Obesity above national rates for all age groups, Rural kids less likely to walk to school, Populace is very auto-reliant, High child poverty rates for every racial and ethnic group, Lack of access to specialized medical care
- Housing “calamity” looming
Increased demand by down-sizing seniors, young professionals, trades people and minorities for smaller homes and multi-family housing versus oversupply of single-family homes, Rental share of housing market will increase substantially nationwide and be particularly challenging in nonurban areas
- Energy Issues
Cost of fuel, Population very reliant on autos, Climate change implications
- Growth and Development Challenges in Small Cities and Rural Areas
Declining downtowns and incompatible development in historic areas/loss of community character, Loss of natural areas and open space, Suburban-style large-lot growth at city edges, Limited housing choices, Lack of transportation options, Limited planning capacity¹¹

What does this mean for missional leadership and ecclesiology? According to Alvin Luedke, this “farm crisis presents some significant challenges for pastors and congregations in small-towns and rural communities. While the congregation is facing challenges of membership loss and financial stress, the needs for pastoral care actually increase.”¹²

¹¹ “Ref_herman_081612.Pdf,” accessed January 22, 2019, https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2014-06/documents/ref_herman_081612.pdf.

¹² Alvin Luedke, “Farm Financial Crisis-Challenges for Ministry among Small Town and Rural Communities, Congregations, and Individuals,” *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* 3, no. 10 (October 1, 2003): para. 7.

Theoretical Lens: Small-town Mentality

Every small-town has its own unique identity shaped by people, experiences, geography, and culture. There are, however, some common themes that tend to run through most Midwest small-towns. There are hundreds of lists, examples, stories, and jokes associated with small-town rural living. Some of these lists play into the stereotypes of rural living and some name a shared reality of small-town mentality related to issues of rural poverty. Some of the common themes named in these lists include the following: life is simple; everyone knows everyone; everyone knows everyone's business; lack of privacy; challenges with employment; influence of religion; and insider/outsider mentality.

The reality of these common themes can strongly influence rural poverty and how we engage in the issues of hunger and homelessness. While some of the themes are merely stereotypes, the perception remains. In a community where it feels like everyone knows everyone else's business it can be extremely difficult to seek assistance when needing help. In a community where you feel like an outsider it can be extremely difficult to engage in community life. In a place where it feels like privacy and anonymity is a foreign concept, using a food pantry or going to social services can be incredibly difficult.

While these themes and stereotypes certainly contribute to a small-town mentality, these themes do not fully define small-town life and ministry. For example, I disagree with any suggestion of small-town rural life as *simple*. The information presented here names a complexity of relationships, complexity of vocation and employment, and a complexity of history and tradition mixed with new ideas and

technology. I will also argue that in the context of this project it may seem like *everyone knows everyone*, but this is not true. Considering Hill Town's population, population turn over, and the population of the surrounding region, it is virtually impossible to know everyone. I also disagree with the idea that *privacy and anonymity* is impossible in a small-town. While it is true that a dynamic exists in which people are paying attention to what others are doing and this can be perceived as intrusive, it is also true that people care about their neighbors. People are not only paying attention to *what* others are doing, they are also paying attention to *how* they are doing. Privacy and confidentiality can exist in a small-town. This is the premise of this entire thesis *Invisible Poverty* acknowledging that we often do not see our neighbor. We often do not see who is living in poverty. It is noted that it can be difficult to stand in line at the food pantry. First of all, there is no shame in utilizing the assistance and being seen in a food pantry line. Secondly, the food pantry volunteers are willing to meet outside normal hours, deliver, or make other special accommodations to avoid embarrassment or shame. Thirdly, the food pantry is only one of many venues in which help is available. This project explored all of the venues of help and how to avoid embarrassment and shame.

Challenges with employment and limited opportunities certainly exist in many rural settings. For people living in poverty, factors that often contribute to limited employment opportunities include a lack of a permanent address, previous work history, childcare, health restrictions, and/or disabilities. These factors are not limited to rural small-town contexts. While there are perhaps limited opportunities, opportunities do exist.

Another common theme named was *influence of religion*. Kola Weisbrich wrote “5 Awkward Things Every Person Living In a Small-town Has To Deal With” and names religion as one of those awkward things. She wrote, “I live in a town where the majority of the population are one religion. For many of them, this means sticking to their own and marrying within that religion.”¹³ Trisha Leigh Zeigenhorn also names her small-town experience as being weirdly religious, “Having to buy stuff online because there are no specialized shops, realizing simultaneously that you’re out of eggs and it is Sunday. Everyone is weirdly religious.”¹⁴ Whether you see this as appropriate or not, the influence of religion is part of our contextual identity.

Insider/outsider mentality was another theme named in a variety of ways. Insider/outsider mentality suggests that some people belong to the community (insiders), and some people do not (outsiders). The criteria to belong to a small-town rural community is often aloof, intangible, and I would argue often unintentional. One unwritten criteria of belonging is whether or not a person *grew-up* in the community. If you grew-up here, you will always be from here. If you did not grow-up here, you might not ever be from here. It is not unusual for a person to say something like, “I have lived here for twenty years but I am not from here.” While insider/outsider mentality can insinuate exclusivity, there is also a helpful application. When an insider needs help, the

¹³ Kola Weisbrich, “5 Awkward Things Every Person Living In A Small Town Has To Deal With,” *Elite Daily*, accessed January 21, 2019, <https://www.elitedaily.com/life/awkward-things-living-small-town/1810216>.

¹⁴ Trisha Leigh Zeigenhorn, “13+ Lifers Share the Pros and Cons of Living in a Small Town,” December 7, 2018, <https://didiyouknowfacts.com/13-lifers-share-the-pros-and-cons-of-living-in-a-small-town/>.

community will rally to the cause and provide time, money, food, shelter, clothing, or whatever is necessary.

In an effort to maximize our calling to participate in God's mission, a Synod Ministry Review¹⁵ was conducted in February and March of 2015. Listening posts were held at three different congregations, including Community Lutheran in Hill Town. The findings of the Synod Ministry Review reflect the common themes of small-town mentality and explore opportunities for ministry within this context. This review was not only helpful for us as a synod, but it was also helpful as a congregation. The goals of the review were to identify and enhance the congregation's strengths; to identify the congregation's most significant challenges; and to hear possible recommendations for addressing those challenges. The findings of the Synod Ministry Review identified several *strengths* of the synod including a strong sense of cultural identity/heritage, a central role of the organized church in the life of the people, strong lay leadership, and wealth of the area. The findings of the Synod Ministry Review identified several *challenges and opportunities* of the synod including biblical illiteracy and a lack of knowledge of the Christian narrative, a geographic divide between those more centralized and those more rural, fear of losing pastor or church building, a pastor-centric church culture, declining populations/parishes/lay leadership, an economic disparity, a large/small divide between congregations, insider/outsider mentality, and substance abuse.

¹⁵ John Hessian and Kenneth W. Inskeep, "Eastern North Dakota Synod Ministry Review" (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, March 2015).

Because we found this process of a synodical ministry review and information so helpful, in January 2018, Community Lutheran Church in Hill Town conducted a Congregational Ministry Review¹⁶ specific to this congregation and context. A team was invited to engage in a process of evaluating the present situation of ministry and imagining God's preferred and promised future. The findings of the Community Lutheran Church Ministry Review identified several congregational *strengths* including ministry with children, youth, Sunday school, confirmation, and worship life are exemplary. Other strengths include a "cornucopia" of gifts, skills, and resources for the health and vibrancy of the congregation and its ministry within and beyond its building walls. Strengths of the congregation include an innovative approach to doing ministry and thinking outside the box, demonstrating an ability and desire to meet challenges as opportunities. Also named as a strength is a wonderful capacity for welcoming all with hospitality that links with community outreach.¹⁷ The findings of the Community Lutheran Church Ministry Review identified several congregational *opportunities* including building life-giving relationships with materially poor neighbors, engaging more members in all the meaningful ministries of the congregation, and providing transportation to youth outside of district and for elderly living within Hill Town. It was also recognized that despite the community of Hill Town demonstrating generosity, there are still children, families and elderly people who go to bed hungry.

¹⁶ Keith Zeh, "Congregational Ministry Review" (ELCA Synod ELCA, January 21, 2018). Report received January 21, 2018.

¹⁷ Zeh, "Congregational Ministry Review."

As a component of the Congregational Ministry Review, we gathered community leaders who were not necessarily members of the congregation to talk about issues we face and how we can better engage these issues. Here are some of the insights from that conversation: Hill Town has a history of reaching out to those in need and struggling. The school system struggles with the socio-economic challenges facing kids and their families. Hill Town has a high risk of depression and suicide among young people. There are residents who are elderly who also struggle with material poverty. Many kids do not see their parents when they get up or go to bed due to work shifts and commuting. The socio-economic divide in Hill Town is “camouflaged” and not readily seen or experienced. Hill Town’s local economy rises and falls with the agricultural economy. In Hill Town, there is a long memory for divisions and hurts. There is a challenge to engage millennials’ involvement in the community. There is a lack of communication between people who seek services and people who seek to provide services.

Theoretical Lens: Shame

When I had the conversation with the high school student who disclosed they did not have enough food, I asked her why she did not ask for help. She simply responded, “ashamed.” In Richard Sennett’s¹⁸ analysis of contemporary society he describes this psychological dynamic as “Intimate Society” and names four social and psychological factors including;

- 1) Concern about the involuntary disclosure of character
- 2) Defense against such disclosure through withdrawal

¹⁸ Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York ; London: W.W. Norton, 1996).

3) Silence

4) The superimposition of private imagery upon the public¹⁹

In *Welcoming the Stranger*, Patrick Keifert adds a fifth dynamic as a fear of being shamed. “When people feel ashamed, they feel as if they are being seen in a very diminished sense. They feel exposed to anyone who wants to look, to anyone who is present. They even feel as if they are small to themselves and are divided against themselves. The unexpected feeling of exposure and self-consciousness characterizes the experience of shame.”²⁰ I remember as a first-year seminary student sitting in Dr. Keifert’s class and he was describing the powerful force of shame. He said all the students in the class were paying a lot of money to be there and to learn, and yet we choose to not ask questions in class for fear of being shamed. We choose to be silent. We choose to withdraw. I remember thinking that he is right. This is one of many manifestations exemplifying the power of shame. Shame has the power to tear at our self-esteem and our self-worth. Shame has some fundamental characteristics similar to guilt yet is distinct from guilt. “It’s an important distinction. Researchers define it this way: Shame means ‘I am bad.’ Guilt means ‘I did something bad.’” Shame is not simply a feeling. I argue that shame is deeper than a feeling and reaches the very core of our self-image and identity. For this project, the working definition of shame is a condition caused by the belief that one is, or is perceived by others to be, inferior, unworthy, or inadequate.

¹⁹ Sennett, 257.

²⁰ Patrick R. Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger: A Public Theology of Worship and Evangelism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 19.

Marilyn J. Sorensen, author of *Breaking the Chain of Low Self-Esteem* and clinical psychologist, describes how shame often originates:

A child's view of herself begins to form as soon as the child is born. Based on the things she is told, the specific situations she experiences, and how she is treated, a picture of her "self" evolves. If she is praised and encouraged, she likely begins to develop healthy self-esteem; if, however, she is consistently criticized, ridiculed, or told she can't do things right, she begins to question her competency and adequacy. If her feelings are ignored, she begins to feel unimportant; if she is shamed, she starts to feel unworthy.²¹

These feelings of inferiority are the genesis of low self-esteem, Sorensen says.

Those who have low self-esteem have one thing in common—on some level they share a deep-seated fear that there is something basically wrong with them and wonder if they may be unlovable or unacceptable.²²

Jane Middelton-Moz names some of the characteristics of adults shamed in childhood in her book *Shame & Guilt: Masters of Disguise*. These characteristics include:

- Adults shamed as children are afraid of vulnerability and fear of exposure of the self.
- Adults shamed as children may suffer extreme shyness, embarrassment and feelings of being inferior to others. They don't believe they make mistakes. Instead they believe they are mistakes.
- Adults shamed as children fear intimacy and tend to avoid real commitment in relationships. These adults frequently express the feeling that one foot is out of the door prepared to run.
- Adults shamed as children may appear grandiose and self-centered or seem selfless.
- Adults shamed as children feel that, "No matter what I do, it won't make a difference; I am and always will be worthless and unlovable."
- Adults shamed as children frequently feel defensive when even a minor negative feedback is given. They suffer feelings of severe humiliation if forced to look at mistakes or imperfections.
- Adults shamed as children frequently blame others before they can be blamed.

²¹ Marilyn J. Sorensen, *Breaking the Chain of Low Self-Esteem* (Sherwood, OR: Wolf Publishing, 1998), 11–12.

²² Sorensen, 192.

- Adults shamed as children may suffer from debilitating guilt. These individuals apologize constantly. They assume responsibility for the behavior of those around them.
- Adults shamed as children feel like outsiders. They feel a pervasive sense of loneliness throughout their lives, even when surrounded with those who love and care.
- Adults shamed as children project their beliefs about themselves onto others. They engage in mind-reading that is not in their favor, consistently feeling judged by others.
- Adults shamed as children often feel ugly, flawed and imperfect. These feelings regarding self may lead to focus on clothing and make-up in an attempt to hide flaws in personal appearance and self.
- Adults shamed as children often feel angry and judgmental towards the qualities in others that they feel ashamed of in themselves. This can lead to shaming others.
- Adults shamed as children often feel controlled from the outside as well as from within. Normal spontaneous expression is blocked.
- Adults shamed as children feel they must do things perfectly or not at all. This internalized belief frequently leads to performance anxiety and procrastination.
- Adults shamed as children experience depression.
- Adults shamed as children block their feelings of shame through compulsive behaviors like workaholics, eating disorders, shopping, substance abuse, list-making, or gambling.
- Adults shamed as children lie to themselves and others.
- Adults shamed as children often have caseloads rather than friendships.
- Adults shamed as children often involve themselves in compulsive processing of past interactions and events and intellectualization as a defense against pain.
- Adults shamed as children have little sense of emotional boundaries. They feel constantly violated by others. They frequently build false boundaries through walls, rage, pleasing, or isolation.
- Adults shamed as children are stuck in dependency or counter-dependency.²³

Shame is the most persistent attribute of contemporary poverty. This project has explored ways to avoid shame and embarrassment, to listen, to walk with, and to build up. We have learned each other's story and become a part of each other's story. "If we

²³ Jane Middleton-Moz, *Shame and Guilt: The Masters of Disguise* (Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, 1990), 5–6.

can share our story with someone who responds with empathy and understanding, shame can't survive.”²⁴

Theoretical Lens: Praxis

Richard Osmer defines practical theology as “the branch of theology that seeks to construct action-guiding theories of Christian Praxis in particular social contexts.”²⁵

Osmer proposes a model of practical theological interpretation with four tasks:

1. The descriptive-empirical task asks, ‘What is going on?’
2. The interpretive task asks, ‘Why is it going on?’
3. The normative task asks, ‘What must we do?’
4. The pragmatic task asks, ‘How do we get there?’

Osmer’s model of practical theological interpretation has provided a framework for this project but also provides a framework for continued praxis beyond the timeline of this project. The descriptive-empirical task asks, ‘What is going on?’ I got at this question by gathering context and demographical information, conducting a baseline survey, and interviewing willing participants. The interpretive task asks, ‘Why is it going on?’ I got at this question by studying fields of literature, external studies, and organizations within the local community. The normative task asks, ‘What must we do?’ I got at this through theoretical, theological, and biblical study. I also interviewed four willing participants who had experienced or are experiencing poverty and gave them voice in what is and is not helpful. The pragmatic task asks, ‘How do we get there?’ The independent variables

²⁴ Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* (Avery, 2012), 68.

²⁵ Richard Robert Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co. 2008), xiv.

of this project included four interventions: (1) newsletter article, (2) a sermon, (3) Bible study, and (4) a service project. Each intervention was followed up with a focus group to help evaluate the intervention's effectiveness. The end line survey was a quantitative census questionnaire in which the entire congregation 18 years old and older was invited to participate. This process helped shape our pragmatic task.

The theoretical lenses identified in chapter 2 (Rural Poverty, Small-town Mentality, Shame, and Praxis) are helpful in recognizing and understanding poverty in a rural small-town context. Chapter 3 explores the biblical and theological lenses that gave shape and informed the research project and are helpful in exploring the church's role concerning poverty.

CHAPTER 3

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL LENSES

Chapter 2 took a close look at the theoretical lenses that gave shape and informed this research project. Chapter 3 explores biblical and theological lenses that led me to the research question: *How might Action Research interventions affect awareness, attitudes, and actions of the congregation concerning the issues of poverty?* The biblical lenses include Matthew 25 *I Was Hungry*, Romans 3 *Without Distinction*, John 6 *The Bread of Life*, and Luke 24 *The Road to Emmaus*. The theological lenses include Accompaniment, Free to Be, Justice, and Identity.

Biblical Lenses

Biblical Lens: Matthew 25:35-40 I Was Hungry

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”¹

If our neighbor’s house is on fire, the first thing we do is extinguish the fire.

Later, we will determine what caused the fire, how to rebuild, and how to prevent more

¹ New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) is used for all Bible quotations.

fires. We have people in our community who are in need. As people of faith we are called to feed the hungry, to provide drink, to welcome the stranger, to clothe the naked, to care for the sick, and to visit the imprisoned. The first thing we need to do is extinguish the fire and feed the hungry.

According to the “Facts about Hunger and Poverty in America,” children and adults face poverty and hunger in every county across America. In the United States, forty million people struggle with hunger, including more than twelve million children. A household that is food insecure has limited or uncertain access to enough food to support a healthy life. Households with children were more likely to be food insecure than those without children. About 58% of food-insecure households participated in at least one of the major federal food assistance programs — the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamps); the National School Lunch Program, and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (often called WIC).²

In this state, 55,710 people are struggling with hunger—and of them 16,440 are children. That means one in eleven children in the state struggles with hunger.³ In 2019, 32% of the Hill Town’s students qualified for free or reduced lunch. This is up from 24% the previous year. The problem of hunger is not just for someone else somewhere else. We are called to feed a hungry world. We are also called to feed the kids in our neighborhood.

² “Facts About Hunger and Poverty in America | Feeding America,” <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/facts> (accessed January 24, 2019).

³ “Facts About Hunger and Poverty in America | Feeding America.”

Biblical Lens: Romans 3:21-23 Without Distinction

But now, irrespective of law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

We often refer to Matthew 25 by quoting verse 40, “just as you did it to one of the *least of these* who are members of my family, you did it to me.” A question raised from this text is, who are the *least of these*? According to Paul in his letter to the Romans, we have *all* fallen short of the glory of God and we are *all* the least of these. No distinction is made. Galatians 3:26-29 teaches that in Christ Jesus we are *all* children of God through faith. We have been clothed with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of us are one in Christ Jesus. One of the hopes of this research project was to overcome a perception of “we” have something to give “you.” Instead, it is about being in relationship and walking together without distinction.

Biblical Lens: John 6:32-35 Bread of Life

Then Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.” Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

If you give a person a fish, you feed them for a day. If you teach them to fish, you feed them for a lifetime. This research project was not simply about providing a meal or shelter. This project was Christian outreach. We have people who are hungry in our community. The first task is to feed them. In doing so, we share more than a meal. We are sharing life. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives

life to the world. Jesus says, “This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.” In Christ, we receive much more than a meal. In Christ, we receive hope, peace, compassion, grace, mercy, forgiveness, love, comfort, strength, life, and salvation.

Biblical Lens: Luke 24:30-32 Road to Emmaus

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?”

The road to Emmaus is perhaps the most dominant image of this project. This Emmaus story takes place after the resurrection and before the ascension. The disciples walked with their faces downcast. Jesus himself came up and walked with them but they did not recognize him. When they reached the village Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him. It was in the breaking of the bread that Christ was revealed. In facing the problems with poverty in a small-town, it is easy to become discouraged. It is easy to walk with our faces downcast. It is easy to lose hope. The road to Emmaus reminds us that we walk this road together, with Jesus in our presence. Although we do not always recognize the Holy Spirit being at work, God is with us on the road.

Theological Lenses

Theological Lens: Accompaniment

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near. Hebrews 10:24-25

What is God up to here and how do we participate in it? The term *missio Dei* is often translated from Latin as “Mission of God” or “Sending of God.” *Missio Dei* recognizes that mission is not merely an activity of the church or leader but rather is the result of God’s initiative and centered in God’s action. Jürgen Moltmann says, “It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church.”⁴ In the discernment of the church’s role in mission, it is important to acknowledge that the mission is not *our* mission, but rather it is *God’s* mission. That is not to say the missionary activities of the church are not important. They are. To participate in the missionary activities of the church is to participate in the movement of God’s love toward people. David Bosch writes, “Our missionary activities are only authentic insofar as they reflect participation in the mission of God.”⁵

In John 15:5, Jesus says, “I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.” We have no ability to bear fruit. Our role in God’s mission is not to bear fruit, our role is to abide. Van Gelder writes, “Mission is no longer understood in this conversation primarily in functional terms as something the church does; rather, it is understood in terms of something the church is, something that is related to its nature.”⁶

⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*, 1st Fortress Press ed (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 64.

⁵ David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Twentieth anniversary ed, American Society of Missiology Series, no. 16 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 391.

⁶ Craig Van Gelder, “Theological Education and Missional Leadership Formation: Can Seminaries Prepare Missional Leaders for Congregations?” in *The Missional Church & Leadership Formation*:

What does it mean for the missional church to participate in God's mission?

Missional church starts with faithfulness, prayer, and discernment. It is about being a disciple, student, and apprentice. It is about walking together with our neighbor. It is about listening and learning. It is about following. It is about "being" rather than "doing."

This perspective of mission has come to be known as missional accompaniment. In 1999 the ELCA adopted a missional theology of accompaniment in "Global Mission in the Twenty-First Century: A Vision of Evangelical Faithfulness in God's Mission."

Missional accompaniment is defined as "walking together in a solidarity that practices interdependence and mutuality."⁷ The ELCA strives to live out accompaniment in relationships with global companions, and to share God's love and participate in God's mission together. The principles of accompaniment include:

- Mutually: All of us have gifts to support God's mission. There is no mission to, only mission with and among.
- Inclusively: We seek to build relationships across boundaries that exclude and divide.
- Vulnerably: Just as Jesus became vulnerable to us, we open ourselves to others.
- Empowering: We seek to identify and correct imbalances of power, which may mean recognizing and letting go of our own.
- Sustainably: To ensure local ministries last for a long time, we seek to embed mission in ongoing relationships and communities.⁸

These principles were used throughout this project by walking in solidarity and interdependence with people who have experienced and are experiencing poverty. The aim was to participate in mission *with* our neighbors and not *to* our neighbors. The aim

Helping Congregations Develop Leadership Capacity, Missional Church Series (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2009), 42.

⁷ ELCA, "Global Mission."

⁸ ELCA, "Global Mission."

was to build relationships, to recognize the vulnerability of the neighbor and to be vulnerable with the neighbor. The aim was to empower and equip the saints and embed mission in ongoing relationships and community.

Theological Lens: Free to Be

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life. Ephesians 2:4-10

Community Lutheran Church is affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. As Lutherans we believe we are saved by grace through faith as a gift from God. This theology acknowledges that our works do not justify, but rather it is God that justifies by grace. Although our works do not justify, we are, however, called to live an externally honorable life. In Luther's *The Freedom of a Christian*, he explains, "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."⁹ He writes that Christians are free from trying to justify themselves through the works of the law, because there is no external thing that the human does to produce righteousness. Luther then addresses the second proposition concerning how Christians are subject to none, yet subject to all. He does this by focusing on the physical nature of man, the "outer man." Good works are commanded to discipline the body, please God, and to serve your neighbor. These good works should freely flow

⁹ Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, vol. LW 31 (Minneapolis, MN Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 277.

from the body. We are free to serve our neighbor. “So the Christian who is consecrated by his faith does good works, but the works do not make him holier or more Christian, for that is the work of faith alone . . . Good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works.”¹⁰ Luther coined the term *Theology of the Cross* to describe this theology of how God saves. Theology of the Cross contrasts with a theology of glory that places emphasis on human ability, works, decisions, and reason. Theology of the Cross teaches that humans cannot earn righteousness or increase the righteousness of the cross by their own will or works. The Theology of the Cross teaches alien righteousness that is given to humanity from the outside.

Acknowledging that we are saved by grace and not works does not mean we turn from the work we are called to do and who we are called to be. According to Gerhard Forde, “Becoming a theologian of the cross involves turning to face the problems, joys, and sorrows of everyday life.”¹¹ The hope of this project was to turn and face the problems, joys, and sorrows of everyday life in our community. Theology of the Cross teaches that out of death comes life, out of suffering comes joy, out of despair comes hope. The hope of this project was to see *poverty* and call it what it actually is. The hope was to see *suffering* and call it what it actually is. The hope was to see *the cross* and call it what it actually is. The hope was to see what God has done and continues to do in and through the congregation and community. As theologians of the cross, we are vessels of grace. We are called to serve our neighbor and face the problems, joys, and sorrows of

¹⁰ LW 31:297.

¹¹ Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 9–10.

everyday life. We are free from trying to justify ourselves. We are free to be, free to participate in the mission of God.

Theological Lens: Justice

Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and so the LORD, the God of hosts, will be with you, just as you have said. Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the LORD, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph. I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream. Amos 5:14-15, 21-24

Bryan Stevenson, the founder of Equal Justice Initiative, a nonprofit legal practice dedicated to defending those most marginalized by our society, describes poverty this way: “I believe that in many parts of this country, and certainly in many parts of this globe, the opposite of poverty is not wealth. I think, in too many places, the opposite of poverty is justice.”¹² When we think about justice, we tend to think about human justice, yet the justice we are talking about here is God’s justice. In the book of Amos, people were living in a time of prosperity. This prosperity, however, was limited to the wealthy. The prosperity fed on injustice. Prosperity fed on oppression of the poor. Religious observance was insincere, self-serving, and superficial. With courage and passion, Amos speaks to good and evil, speaks to justice, and speaks to religious observances. Amos *first* reminds us to love what is good and hate what is evil. Surround yourself with good things. Be involved in good activities, organizations, hobbies, and language. We are

¹² Bryan Stevenson, “Bryan Stevenson on Why the Opposite of Poverty Isn’t Wealth, but Justice,” ART19, <https://art19.com/shows/the-ezra-klein-show/episodes/798a067e-cf22-47cf-a2f2-c3d93b5ac01d> (accessed January 25, 2019).

called to walk together. We are called to be part of the solution, not part of the problem.

The *second* point Amos talks about is justice. What is justice? Merriam-Webster defines justice as

- the assignment of merited rewards or punishments
- the establishment or determination of rights according to the rules of law or equity, a system of justice
- the quality of being just, impartial, or fair questioned the justice of the their decision
- conformity to truth, fact, or reason¹³

In United States civil society, a government of democracy, we have an understanding of justice. This is a system of rewards and punishments, established (in theory) as being just, impartial, and fair conforming to truth, fact, or reason. Michael Welker offers a new perspective of justice. Welker presents what he calls a “realistic theology” that (1) “takes seriously the various biblical traditions with their differing ‘settings in life,’” (2) “new ways examines past, present, and future experiences and expectation of God, testing them to interconnections and for differences,” (3) “wants to let the experienced or expected reality of God come forward in ever-new ways.”¹⁴ Welker presents God’s promised Spirit of justice and peace as being at the crossroads of justice, mercy, and knowledge of God. He describes the strict intersection of all three in the fulfillment of God’s law.

In U.S. civil law, Lady Justice (*Iustitia*, the Roman goddess of justice) stands as a symbol of objectivity and fairness. Lady Justice is blindfolded exemplifying (in theory)

¹³ Merriam-Webster, accessed January 24, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/justice>.

¹⁴ Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*, 46–47.

blind justice of equality of the law. In God's law, according to Welker, justice is not possible without mercy. In describing the function of God's law, Welker states, "the law remains a functional interconnection of ordinances that serve the founding of justice, the routinization of mercy, and the cultivation of the public, universally accessible relation with God."¹⁵ In civil law, we tend to want objectivity, fairness, and *you get what you deserve* justice. In Christ, we do not get what we deserve, we get mercy. This is not blind justice. This is eyes wide open justice and seeing things for what they are. It is important to point out that I have recognized blind justice in civil society only in theory. It is important to note the prejudices of racism, sexism, ageism, etc. exist in in our civil society and these prejudices influence poverty and oppression. The point here is recognizing the difference between human justice and God's justice. Where human justice fails, God's justice prevails. The biblical definition of justice recognizes God as sinless and the human as sinful. Justice demands that all sinful people receive punishment because of their sin. In Christ the requirements of divine justice are met. The judgment has been made. The price has been paid. The victory has been won. On the cross, Jesus takes our sin, takes our pain, and takes our death. In exchange, Jesus gives us mercy, gives us forgiveness, and gives us life. Is this a fair deal? Is it equal and balanced? No, but none the less this is divine justice. This is what Luther calls the "Joyous Exchange."¹⁶ God has given his Son. God has given forgiveness. God has given life. We, upon receiving this gift, have a responsibility. We have a responsibility to each other. Amos had a heart for those who were marginalized, those who were oppressed, the hungry, and

¹⁵ Welker, 111.

¹⁶ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Weimar (New York, NY: Wentworth Press, 2018), 608.

the poor. We are called to serve those who are marginalized. Jesus says, “I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me. I was sick and you looked after me. I was in prison and you came and visited me.” This. . . is justice. It is not about rewards or punishments. It is about forgiveness. It is not about fair and balanced. It is about grace. It is not about the administration of the law. It is about the administration of the gospel.

The *third* point from Amos is about religious observances. The religious observances of the time had become insincere, self-serving, and superficial. This is reprimanded. “For I despise your festivals, and take no delight in your solemn assemblies. I will not accept your offerings. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen. But rather, *let justice* roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” This is who we are as people of faith. This is who we are as Christians. This is who we are as church. We are not to be insincere, self-serving, or superficial but, like Amos, with courage and passion we are to speak to injustice, stand up for the oppressed, and proclaim the victory of the cross, the victory of good over evil, the victory of life over death.

Right now in our world and even in our community, we are overwhelmed with injustice. In Hill Town we have people who are hungry, we have discrimination, and we have people struggling with abuse and addiction. We have kids in our youth group and in our community who do not have enough to eat, who do not have adequate clothing or shelter. In Hill Town we also have people of faith. We have people who care. We have people who want to help. We are called to get involved in something good, not with blind

justice but with eyes wide open, seeing the needs of our neighbors, seeing the Holy Spirit at work, and seeing good things in the world.

Theological Lens: Identity

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? Micah 6:8

What is God's preferred and promised future for this congregation and community? One of the recommendations of the Congregational Ministry Review¹⁷ names the opportunity to gain more clarity within the congregation about the congregation's God given purpose as it relates to its context/surrounding mission field and to translate the congregation's mission statement: "The Mission of Community Lutheran Church is to be a place where Christ's love is proclaimed as we welcome, worship, learn, and serve together."¹⁸

In light of these insights gained we entered a communal discernment process to reevaluate this mission statement. We recognized three problems with the statement. First, it names the mission as "The Mission of Community Lutheran Church." The mission is not ours, it is God's mission. Second, the statement names Community Lutheran's mission "to be a place." The church is not a "place." Third, nobody remembers it. We knew we had to dig deeper into our identity and discern a mission statement that reflected God's mission and how we participate in it. Who are we? What is God up to? Does the church have a mission or does God's mission have a church?

¹⁷ Zeh, "Congregational Ministry Review."

¹⁸ Zeh, "Congregational Ministry Review."

Cheryl M. Peterson adds insight to these questions. She argues in her book *Who is the Church? An Ecclesiology for the Twenty-First Century* that most congregations are asking, “What shall we do?” “What is the church for?” or “Why the church?” Peterson suggests we are asking the wrong questions. The real question facing the church today is a question of identity, “Who is the church?” *Who Is the Church* engages various theological accounts of the church, presenting two contemporary ecclesiological paradigms. The first paradigm examined is church as Word Event. This paradigm tends to focus on “God’s word of promise addressed to us, the communion of the Triune God’s being, and the mission of the Triune God (*missio Dei*).”¹⁹ The second paradigm presented is church as Communion. This ecclesiology presents church not as an event, but rather as the very divine life of the Triune God. Whereas the first paradigm presents ecclesiology as the proclamation of the word and administration of the sacraments, this paradigm recognizes the church as “the body of Christ, a mystical communion, an organism through which members participate in the divine life, most centrally in the celebration of the Eucharist.”²⁰

It is acknowledged that there is value in both of these paradigms. However, Peterson also acknowledges a presumption of both of these paradigms were developed under Christendom. Peterson offers a postmodern ecclesiology in which “the church must wrestle with its theological identity and purpose in a society that can no longer assume the centrality and influence of the church in people’s lives.”²¹ Peterson addresses the

¹⁹ Cheryl M. Peterson, *Who Is the Church? An Ecclesiology for the Twenty-First Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 37.

²⁰ Peterson, *Who Is the Church?*, 9.

²¹ Cheryl M. Peterson, *Who Is the Church?*, 83.

development of a third church concept, the “missional church.” Drawing from the work of Newbigin, Bosch, Raiser, Zscheile, Van Gelder, and Guder, the author explored various perspectives of *missio Dei* and the church’s role in it. Peterson proposes a narrative ecclesiology originating from the Spirit, following the story of the church in the Acts of the Apostles, and applies this method to the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds with particular focus on the third article. She also draws heavily upon *Luther’s Large Catechism* stating:

The Holy Spirit effects our being made holy through the community of saints.
 The Holy Spirit effects our being made holy through the forgiveness of sins.
 The Holy Spirit effects our being made holy through the resurrection of the body
 and the life everlasting.²²

The central argument is that the church finds its identity in the activity of the Holy Spirit. “The church is created by and is a part of this movement of the Spirit outward. It is in this *missio Dei* that the church finds its identity and purpose.”²³ While Community Lutheran church has struggled with confusion over church identity, we turn to the work of the Holy Spirit to find identity and purpose.

Community Lutheran Church in Hill Town is a congregation rooted in rich Trinitarian tradition and theology. Many of the members are able to articulate God as Father, creator, all-powerful, and eternal. People are able to articulate a Christology of Jesus as Son, savior, messiah, begotten, died, resurrected, and seated at the right hand of the Father. People have more trouble, however, articulating their understanding of Holy Spirit. In Lois Malcom’s book *Holy Spirit: Creative Power in Our Lives* she gets at

²² Martin Luther, Paul Timothy McCain, and Rodney L Rathmann, *Luther’s Large Catechism: With Study Questions* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Pub. House, 2010).

²³ Peterson, 94.

questions of: Who is the Holy Spirit? How do we experience the Spirit in our lives and world? Drawing on biblical story, theological writings, theology, and experience, Malcolm invites us into our own “bold encounter with the Spirit’s creative power and life.”²⁴ The imagination for the Holy Spirit that seems to be predominant in this congregation has to do with *feeling* the presence of God internally and individually. It seems to have to do with emotion. I will not belittle the significance of this, but Malcolm gives us a plethora of images of the Holy Spirit beyond an emotion including *ruach*, Judges, Kings, Prophets, judgement and promise, law and gospel, justice, human spirit, baptism, dove, temptation, birth, community, faith, hope, and love.²⁵

As Lutherans we believe the Spirit is at work in Word and Sacrament. There have been times I have presided over sacraments when the Holy Spirit was obviously present when people are moved to tears and lives seem to be changed before our eyes. Other times I have presided over sacraments and seem to feel nothing at all. I have wondered if the Holy Spirit simply did not show up. I have come to realize the Holy Spirit always shows up. “God’s Spirit is there when we surrender to God’s will for our lives . . . God’s Spirit is there when we do not surrender and are not faithful to God . . . God’s Spirit is there when we sin and repent of our sin.”²⁶ The Holy Spirit calls, gathers, comforts, teaches, and sends.²⁷ The Holy Spirit creates faith. The Holy Spirit creates love. The Holy

²⁴ Lois Malcolm, *Holy Spirit: Creative Power in Our Lives*, Lutheran Voices Series (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2009), 10.

²⁵ Malcolm

²⁶ Malcolm, 21.

²⁷ Martin Luther and Timothy J Wengert, *Luther’s Small Catechism: With Evangelical Lutheran Worship Texts*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2008), 31.

Spirit creates hope. It is in the activity of the Holy Spirit that we find our identity and purpose.

In the discernment of how the congregation might order its life to participate in the mission of God, we formed a visioning team to discern God's mission in and through Community Lutheran. This visioning team surveyed the congregation and studied the resources available. Shaped by scripture, theology, and prayer, the team presented the mission statement, *Helping people experience the love of God* to the congregation. The congregation unanimously approved.

Peterson presented three paradigms in *Who is the Church* in which it is acknowledged that the first two were developed under Christendom, causing Peterson to offer a third church concept, the "missional church." While we recognize we too have entered this new missional era, it is worth noting that Christendom has not died in rural small-town America. The small-town mentality described in chapter 2 named the influence of religion in small-town rural communities. The findings of the Synod Ministry Review affirm this perception and resonate with our local context concerning the expectation that people should be connected with a church. "Many participants at the listening posts suggested the church retains a central place in the life and culture of the area. As one pastor put it, 'Christendom has not died here.' In this context there is a perceived duty or sense of obligation to participate in/with the institutional church."²⁸ Whether you see this as appropriate or not, Christendom is still alive in this small-town and is part of our contextual identity. While we, as the church, see this as a good thing,

²⁸ Hessian and Inskip, "Synod Ministry Review" 2.

we want to be acutely aware and respectful of what this means for those who are outside the Lutheran or Christian faith tradition.

This chapter explored the biblical and theological lenses that gave shape and informed the research project. The biblical lenses include Matthew 25 *I Was Hungry*, Romans 3 *Without Distinction*, John 6 *The Bread of Life*, and Luke 24 *The Road to Emmaus*. The theological lenses include Accompaniment, Free to Be, Justice, and Identity. Chapter 4 expounds on the research design and methodology introduced in chapter 1.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

The biblical, theological, and theoretical lenses as described in chapter 2 and chapter 3 gave shape and informed this research project. A close look at the issues, challenges, and struggles of our community and congregation led me to the research question: *How might Action Research interventions affect awareness, attitudes, and actions of the congregation concerning the issues of poverty?*

The social science methodology used is Action Research (AR). “Action research is social research carried out by a team that encompasses a professional action researcher and the members of an organization, community, or network (stakeholders) who are seeking to improve the participants’ situation. AR promotes broad participation in the research process and supports action leading to a more just, sustainable, or satisfying situation for the stakeholders.”¹

The intent of Action Research is for change and transformation to happen. I conducted quantitative research using a census baseline questionnaire. The population of the census was the congregation in which sixty-five people participated. I conducted qualitative research by interviewing four willing participants who had experienced or were experiencing poverty with at least one youth or child in the household. Informed by the four interviews, I implemented four interventions which included (1) a newsletter article, (2) a sermon, (3) Bible study, and (4) a service project. Each intervention was followed up with a focus group. Finally, I conducted a quantitative end line survey to

¹ Greenwood and Levin, *Introduction to Action Research*, 3.

determine if transformation had occurred. The population of this census was the congregation and sixty-one people participated. Informed consent forms were signed and gathered for the interviews and focus groups. Implied consent forms were used for the baseline and end line surveys (see appendix C). Figure 1 illustrates the research design.

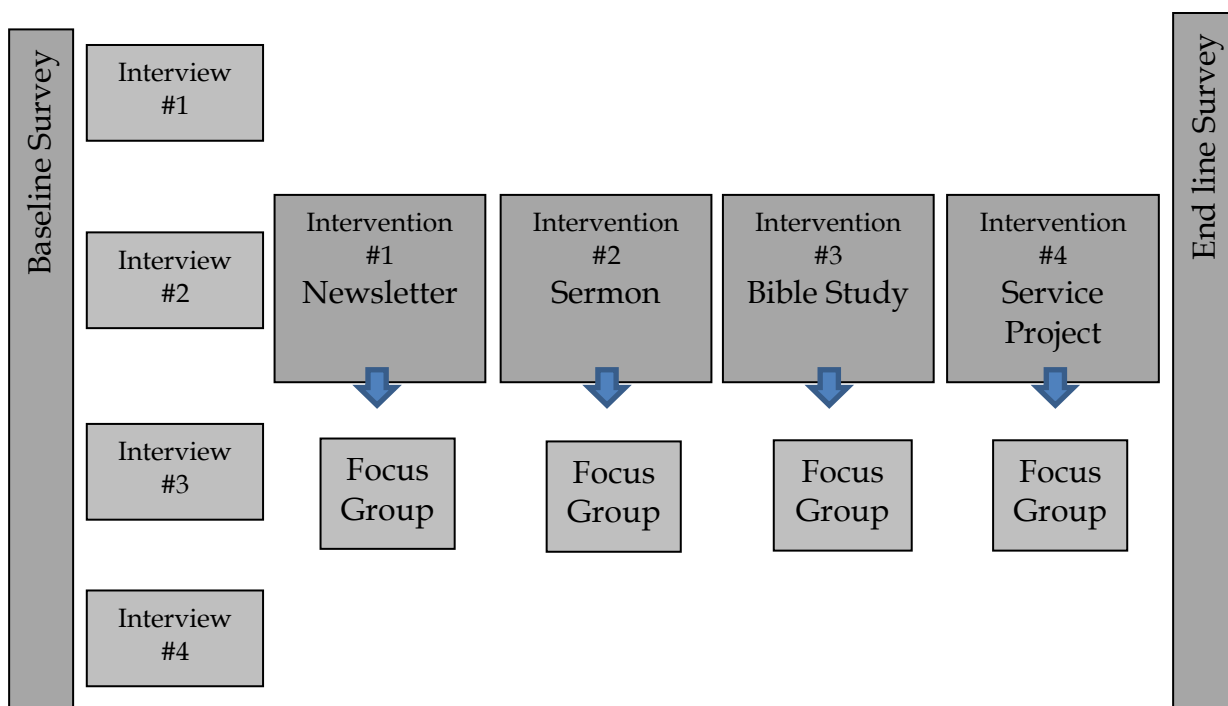


Figure 1. Research Design

The biblical grounding for this research methodology includes Romans 12:2, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be *transformed* by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” AR promotes transformation and supports action leading to a more just, sustainable, or satisfying situation. The intent of this project was to better engage and serve the real issues, problems, and struggles concerning poverty in our community and world. The transformation we were hoping to see was an increased awareness, informed attitudes, and faithful action to provide basic essentials of life.

One of the theoretical lenses described in chapter 2 names a paradigm shift in rural and small-town communities of changing demographics, aging population, outflow of young adults, inflow of older adults, birth rates declining, health issues, auto-reliance, high child poverty rates, housing challenges, growth and development challenges, and declining downtowns. These changes are a reality of small-town rural life. How does the church respond to such change? Action Research gives us an opportunity to identify what is happening and to explore what God is up to here.

The biblical grounding for this research methodology also includes Exodus 18:17-21. When Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, they were freed from bondage. This change brought about new opportunities and new responsibilities. The change in culture called for a change in action. Moses was settling disputes among the people and was kept busy from morning until night. When his father-in law saw this he said,

What you are doing is not good. You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people with you. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. Now listen to me. I will give you counsel, and God be with you! You should represent the people before God, and you should bring their cases before God; teach them the statutes and instructions and make known to them the way they are to go and the things they are to do. You should also look for able men [and women] among all the people, [people] who fear God, are trustworthy, and hate dishonest gain; set such [people] over them as officers over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Exodus 18:17 – 21

This biblical grounding recognizes Moses as a leader, but the work is too much for one person to do alone. Action Research recognizes the researcher as a leader, but also that the work is too much for one person to do alone. I have shared this work with a research team, congregation, and community. This methodology has allowed me to lead *and* to share in the leadership while still maintaining trust and confidentiality with participants and community.

One of the theological groundings of this methodology is *missio Dei* and envisioning the church's role in God's mission. In Craig Van Gelder's book, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, Van Gelder states, "the church is always in need of reforming, even while it engages in forming new practices in relation to continued changes in its context."² The church is experiencing a time of change in culture, denominations, technology, education, sexuality, gender roles, priorities, and influence. Nearly every aspect of the church and everything that surrounds and influences the church is changing. As we envision the church's role in *missio Dei* in a changing culture, Action Research can help us attend to the humanity of persons and the action of God. Another theological grounding of Action Research is the Theology of the Cross. Action Research recognizes the researcher as a leader, but being a theologian of the cross reminds us that God is the actor. In the discernment of our role in facing the problems, joys, and sorrow of everyday life, it is important to acknowledge that the mission is not *our* mission alone, but rather it is *God's* mission. We lead, teach, model, listen, and encourage, but it is God that provides the miracles, hope, love, and compassion. We are vessels of grace providing opportunity, but ultimately it is God that provides hope in the gift of faith. Theology of the Cross teaches that from suffering comes joy, from despair comes hope, from death comes life. In Christ, transformation is possible. "Thus the cross story becomes our story. It presses itself upon us so that it becomes inescapable . . .

² Craig Van Gelder, "The Ministry of the Missional Church," *Deep in the Burbs* (blog), June 8, 2013, 70.

Becoming a theologian of the cross involves turning to face the problems, joys, and sorrows of everyday life.”³

The method used was mixed concurrent including a quantitative census baseline questionnaire in which the entire congregation eighteen years old and older was invited to participate. Qualitative research was conducted with the comment boxes of the census baseline. Qualitative research was also conducted by interviews. I selected four willing participants by purposive/informed sampling who had experienced or were experiencing poverty with at least one youth or child in the household. I selected these four interview participants based on previous conversations concerning the challenges of limited resources in raising a child or children in a small-town rural community. Church membership was not a requirement or expectation of these interviewees. These four interviews helped shape the four interventions and gave voice to the participants who have experienced poverty. The independent variables are the four interventions including; (1) a newsletter article, (2) a sermon, (3) Bible study, and (4) service project. Each intervention was followed up with a focus group. Two of the focus groups were comprised of five willing participants selected by purposive/informed sampling (newsletter and Bible study), one focus group was comprised of six participants (sermon), and the fourth focus group had four participants (service project). The end line survey was a quantitative census questionnaire in which the entire congregation eighteen years old and older was invited to participate. Qualitative research was conducted with the comment boxes of the census end line. The dependent variables measured were the awareness, attitudes, and actions of the congregation concerning poverty. Intervening

³ Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, 9–10.

variables included pride or reluctance to admit or recognize the issue of local poverty. Included in the baseline and end line surveys were questions about age, gender, ethnicity, income level, and how long people have lived in the community. I was able to compare these groups to determine the effect one had on the other. Another intervening variable was the work the congregation and community had already participated in concerning poverty. This included working with the local food pantry, regional shelters and organizations, and food drives. An intervening variable that emerged from the research was the effectiveness of the preacher/teacher/writer/organizer of the interventions. Trust between the researcher and the population proved to be an important component of people's willingness to share their stories and ideas.

Research Team

The AR research team was comprised of four members. Table 1 presents the research team demographics. One of the members of the research team moved out of state during the research process and we continued with three research team members and the researcher. The research team participated in discerning the possibilities for a research topic and question. The research team assisted the researcher in creating the baseline and end line questionnaires. They helped with this process by having computer stations available on Sunday morning, and assisting those who did not feel comfortable with an online survey. The research team field tested the baseline and end line questionnaires. Members of the research team helped the researcher with technology. The research team also assisted in the development of the theoretical coding and the design of the theoretical coding diagram. Table 1 describes the demographics of the research team.

Table 1. Research Team

Participant	Name	Gender	Age
RT-1	Tera	Female	50-59
RT-2	Bria	Female	40-49
RT-3	Paul	Male	60-69
RT-4	Maggie	Female	18-29

Instruments

The quantitative census baseline questionnaire in which the entire congregation eighteen years old and older was invited to participate was conducted through Survey Monkey. The Action Research Team helped with this process by having computer stations available on Sunday morning, and assisting those who did not feel comfortable with an online survey. We had paper copies of the questionnaire available for participants who felt more comfortable with a hard copy of the questionnaire. The researcher manually entered the hard copy questionnaires into Survey Monkey. The Action Research Team field tested the baseline questionnaire. The baseline questionnaire was made available to the whole congregation eighteen years old and older on Sunday, December 8 through Sunday, December 29, 2018. In the baseline survey twenty questions were asked to assess the awareness, attitudes, and actions of the congregation concerning poverty. The baseline questionnaire can be viewed on appendix A.

The qualitative research included four interviews. I selected four willing participants by purposive/informed sampling who had previously experienced or were

currently experiencing poverty with at least one youth or child in the household while living in Hill Town. It was not a requirement to be a member of the church. All interviewees selected had previously contacted me for help or had initiated conversation with me about living in poverty. The first interview was conducted at a coffee shop and it lasted one hour and eight minutes. The second interview was conducted at Community Lutheran Church and it lasted two hours and eleven minutes. The third interview was conducted at Community Lutheran Church and it lasted forty-six minutes. The fourth interview was conducted at Community Lutheran Church and it lasted fifty-one minutes. I gathered these qualitative data via audio recording. I transcribed the data with the use of Temi⁴ software. The interview protocol can be viewed at appendix D.

The first intervention was a newsletter article implemented into the March congregational newsletter. The newsletter article was made available to the congregation February 24. A focus group was conducted on Tuesday, February 26. The focus group was selected by purposive/informed sampling. I selected participants based on diversity of age and gender. The focus group protocol can be viewed at appendix L. The newsletter article can be viewed at appendix I. All focus group *in vivo* codes can be viewed at appendix F. The second intervention was a sermon implemented on Sunday, March 3. A focus group was conducted after the two worship services with five participants following the same protocol as the first focus group. The sermon can be viewed at appendix J. The third intervention was a Bible study implemented on Tuesday, March 5. A focus group was conducted immediately after the intervention. The bible study can be viewed at appendix K. The fourth intervention was a service project implemented on

⁴ Temi is an audio to text transcription service and application: <https://www.temi.com>

Wednesday, April 3. We served at a Good Prairie Food Distribution drop site in the neighboring town. People volunteered to participate in this intervention. A focus group was conducted immediately after the intervention with four participants from Community Lutheran.

The quantitative end line questionnaire was made available to the whole congregation eighteen years old and older Sunday, April 7 through Sunday, May 5, 2019. The end line questionnaire in which the entire congregation eighteen years old and older was invited to participate was conducted through Survey Monkey. The Action Research Team helped with this process by having computer stations available on Sunday morning, and assisting those who did not feel comfortable with an online survey. We had paper copies of the questionnaire available for participants who felt more comfortable with a hard copy of the questionnaire. The end line questionnaire included the original twenty questions from the baseline with an additional five questions to determine which interventions were participated in and to determine the effectiveness of the intervention. The researcher manually entered the hard copy questionnaires into Survey Monkey. The Action Research Team field tested the end line questionnaire. The end line questionnaire can be viewed at appendix B.

Analysis of Data

Quantitative

Quantitative statistical analysis gets at the breadth of the research. I used SPSS⁵ software for quantitative statistical analysis. The two types of quantitative statistics used includes descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Table 2 provides a description of descriptive statistics and inferential statistics.

Table 2. Quantitative Data Analysis

Statistics	Description
Descriptive	Describes, shows, and/or summarizes data including the total number of responses, frequencies, mean, and percentages.
Inferential	Infers conclusions about a population from the data obtained from a sample using independent t-tests.

Descriptive statistics consists of collection, organization, summarization, and presentation of numbers used to describe data. I used descriptive statistics to analyze the data in general including;

- N – total number of responses for the question
- Frequencies (n) – number in each response category
- Mean – arithmetic average and percentages by category where appropriate

I used inferential statistical tests including independent t-tests for the whole group to analyze if there are significant differences between two means, or the means of two

⁵ SPSS Statistics is a software package used for interactive, or batched, statistical analysis: <https://www.ibm.com/analytics/spss-statistics-software>

groups. Independent t-tests allowed me to analyze the change in awareness and actions from the baseline survey to the end line survey.

Qualitative

Qualitative data analysis gets at the depth of the research. Kathy Charmaz's *Constructing Grounded Theory* provided a practical step by step guide for qualitative analysis. According to Charmaz, it is important to start with data. "We construct these data through our observations, interactions, and materials that we gather about the topic or setting. We study empirical events and experiences and pursue our hunches and potential analytic ideas about them."⁶ Using Charmaz's process for coding qualitative data I conducted coding through four main phases: initial coding, focused coding, axial coding, and theoretical coding. Table 3 presents each coding phase and description.

Table 3. Qualitative Data Analysis

Coding Phase	Description
Initial Coding	Identifying specific language and specific terms line-by-line to create <i>in vivo</i> codes.
Focused Coding	Identifying the most significant and/or frequent codes and collecting similar <i>in vivo</i> codes into categories.
Axial Coding	The process of developing subcategories by grouping focused codes.
Theoretical Coding	Identifying possible relationships between categories developed in your axial coding.

⁶ Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory* (London ; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006), 3.

Initial Coding

Charmaz offers three initial coding options including word-by-word, line-by-line, and incident-by-incident coding. My initial coding was done line-by-line. “Coding every line may seem like an arbitrary exercise because not every line contains a complete sentence and not every sentence may appear to be important. Nevertheless, it can be an enormously useful tool.”⁷

During the initial coding phase I made every effort to;

- Remain open
- Stay close to the data
- Keep codes simple and precise
- Construct short codes
- Preserve actions
- Compare data with data
- Move quickly through the data⁸

During initial coding, I asked:

- What is this data?
- What does the data suggest? Pronounce?
- From whose point of view?
- What theoretical category does this specific datum indicate?⁹

During initial coding, I paid attention to and identified specific language and looked at specific terms that condense meaning. This, according to Charmaz, is called *in vivo* codes. *In vivo* codes help us to preserve participants’ meanings of their views and actions in the coding itself by using the interviewees’ own words. Three kinds of *in vivo* codes prove to be helpful:

⁷ Charmaz, 50.

⁸ Charmaz, 49.

⁹ Charmaz, 47.

- Those general terms everyone ‘knows’ that flag condensed but significant meanings
- A participant’s innovative term that captures meanings or experience
- Insider shorthand terms specific to a particular group that reflect their perspective¹⁰

Focused Coding

Focused coding is more “directed, selective, and conceptual than word-by-word, line-by-line, and incident-by-incident coding . . . Focused coding means using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through large amounts of data.”¹¹

Throughout this analysis process I remained open and allowed data to speak for itself. By using their own words from *in vivo* codes I clustered similar words, phrases, statements, and ideas into focused codes. I did this process of focusing these codes several times narrowing down the data to thirty-five focused codes.

Axial Coding

Axial coding is the process of developing subcategories focusing on process rather than themes. Potential subcategories include when, where, why, who, how, and with what consequences. “Axial coding relates categories to subcategories, specifies the properties and dimensions of a category and reassembles the data you have fractured during initial coding to give coherence to the emerging analysis.”¹²

¹⁰ Charmaz, 55.

¹¹ Charmaz, 57.

¹² Charmaz, 60.

Theoretical Coding

Theoretical coding “is a sophisticated level of coding that follows the codes you have selected during focused coding. . . theoretical codes specify possible relationships between categories you have developed in your focused coding.”¹³ Theoretical coding gives form to the focused codes already collected and moves the story in theoretical direction. *Constructing Grounded Theory* presents theoretical coding families including causes, contexts, contingences, consequences, co-variances, conditions, degree, dimension, interactive, theoretical, and type.¹⁴

The intent of this project was to better engage and serve the real issues, problems, and struggles concerning poverty in our community and world. The change we were hoping to see was increased awareness, informed attitudes, and faithful action to provide basic essentials of life. The results of the research are presented in chapter 5.

¹³ Charmaz, 63.

¹⁴ Charmaz, 63.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

Chapter 4 described the Action Research methodology of this research process in which mixed method approach was used implementing both quantitative and qualitative research. Quantitative research was conducted using a census baseline questionnaire and end line questionnaire. Qualitative research was conducted with the comment boxes of the baseline and end line questionnaires. Qualitative research was also conducted by having interviews with four willing participants who had experienced or were experiencing poverty with at least one youth or child in the household. Chapter 5 presents the results of this research starting with a report of the participants, data findings, quantitative research, and qualitative research. After presenting the results I explain and interpret the findings and the meaning of the data gathered and their relationship to answering the research question: *How might Action Research interventions affect awareness, attitudes, and actions of the congregation concerning the issues of poverty?*

Report and Interpretation

Introductory Summary Narrative

I was able to draw results from every component of this research design including the baseline survey, interviews, interventions, focus groups, and the end line survey. The intent of Action Research is for change and transformation to happen. Change and transformation have been measured in a variety of ways. In the baseline survey twenty

questions were asked to assess the awareness, attitudes, and actions of the congregation concerning poverty (see appendix A). I conducted the interviews and coded the responses. After each intervention I conducted focus groups and coded the responses. I conducted an end line survey asking the original twenty questions from the baseline with an additional five questions to determine which interventions were participated in and to determine the effectiveness of the intervention (see appendix B). I compared the baseline and the end line to assess change and transformation that did or did not happen during the course of this research.

Participants

Baseline and End line Participants

The baseline questionnaire was made available to the whole congregation eighteen years old and older on Sunday, December 8 through Sunday, December 29, 2018. The end line questionnaire was made available to the whole congregation eighteen years old and older Sunday, April 7 through Sunday, May 5, 2019. The baseline surveyed sixty-five participants and the end line surveyed sixty-one participants. It was not a requirement to be a member to participate. Table 4 illustrates survey participant gender profiles. One participant of the end line questionnaire did not indicate gender.

Table 4. Survey Participant Gender Profile

	Baseline N=65		End Line N=61	
	n	%	n	%
Female	41	63.08	40	66.67
Male	24	36.92	20	33.33
Total	65	100.00	60	100.00

Interview Participants

I selected four willing participants by purposive/informed sampling who had experienced or were experiencing poverty with at least one youth or child in the household while living in Hill Town. It was not a requirement to be a member of the church to participate. All interviewees selected had previously contacted me for help or had initiated conversation with me about living in poverty. I had a list of twenty-two people who I could ask to participate in these interviews who met the criteria. The first four people I asked agreed to participate. Table 5 illustrates interview participant profiles.

Table 5. Interview Participants

Participant	Name	Gender	Age
IP-1	Lee	Female	40-49
IP-2	Jean	Female	50-59
IP-3	Randy	Male	60-69
IP-4	Alyssa	Female	30-39

Focus Group Participants

Intervention 1 Newsletter Focus Group

The first intervention was a newsletter article implemented into the March congregational newsletter. The newsletter was made available to the congregation February 24. A focus group was conducted on Tuesday, February 26 by five participants. These participants were selected by purposive/informed sampling. I selected participants based on diversity of age and gender. Table 6 illustrates newsletter focus group participant profiles.

Table 6. Newsletter Focus Group Participants

Participant	Name	Gender	Age
FC1-1	Renea	Female	70-79
FC1-2	Tina	Female	60-69
FC1-3	Kristi	Female	50-59
FC1-4	Wade	Male	60-70
FC1-5	Jim	Male	70-79

Intervention 2 Sermon Focus Group

The second intervention was a sermon implemented on Sunday, March 3. A focus group was conducted after the two worship services by six participants selected by purposive/informed sampling. I selected participants based on diversity of age and gender. Table 7 illustrates sermon focus group participant profiles.

Table 7. Sermon Focus Group Participants

Participant	Name	Gender	Age
FC2-1	Mary	Female	70-79
FC2-2	Jenny	Female	30-39
FC2-3	Sara	Female	60-69
FC2-4	Ruth	Female	50-59
FC2-5	Ben	Male	60-70
FC2-6	Ted	Male	80-89

Intervention 3 Bible Study Focus Group

The third intervention was a Bible study implemented on Wednesday, March 6. A focus group was conducted immediately after the intervention by five participants. These participants were selected by purposive/informed sampling. I selected participants based on diversity of biblical and theological perspective. Table 8 illustrates the Bible study focus group participant profiles.

Table 8. Bible Study Focus Group Participants

Participant	Name	Gender	Age
FC3-1	Jay	Male	40-49
FC3-2	Gary	Male	60-69
FC3-3	Paul	Male	60-69
FC3-4	Joel	Male	60-69
FC3-5	Lance	Male	50-59

Intervention 4 Service Project Focus Group

The fourth intervention was a service project implemented on Wednesday, April 3. We served at a Good Prairie Food Distribution drop site in the neighboring town. People volunteered to participate in this intervention. A focus group was conducted immediately after the intervention with the four participants from Community Lutheran. These participants were selected by purposive/informed sampling. Table 9 illustrates the profiles of service project focus group participants.

Table 9. Service Project Focus Group Participants

Participant	Name	Gender	Age
FC4-1	Alexis	Female	20-29
FC4-2	Bonnie	Female	50-59
FC4-3	Joan	Female	60-69
FC4-4	Carrie	Female	50-59

Data Findings

Quantitative Results

Quantitative statistical analysis gets at the breadth of the research. I used SPSS software for quantitative statistical analysis. The two types of quantitative statistics used were descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics consists of collection, organization, summarization, and presentation of numbers used to describe data. I used descriptive statistics to analyze the data in general including;

- N – total number of responses for the question
- Frequencies (n)– number in each response category
- Mean – arithmetic average and percentages by category where appropriate

Six specific questions were asked to help evaluate the congregation's awareness of the issues of poverty. These six questions were included in both the baseline and end line questionnaires. The change in responses help determine the change in the congregation's awareness.

Question 1: We have an issue with poverty, hunger, and/or homelessness in Hill Town.

One of the questions asked on both the baseline and end line questionnaires to indicate how aware people are of poverty issues was measured by a Likert scale in which the participant of the survey was asked if they agree with the statement: We have an issue with poverty, hunger, and/or homelessness in Hill Town. The options given were strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree, with 1 representing strongly agree and 5 representing strongly disagree. The lower the score, the stronger the participant agreed with the statement. The baseline survey indicated 13.85% strongly agreed, 66.15% agreed, 15.38% neither agreed nor disagreed, 4.62% disagreed, 0.00% strongly disagreed. When people were asked the same question in the end line survey, 22.95% strongly agreed, 63.93% agreed, 9.84% neither agreed nor disagreed, 3.28% disagreed, and 0.00% strongly disagreed. Table 10 illustrates the responses to question 1.

Table 10. We have an issue with poverty, hunger, and/or homelessness in Hill Town.

	Baseline N=65		End Line N=61	
	n	%	n	%
Strongly Agree	9	13.85	14	22.95
Agree	43	66.15	39	63.93
Neither agree nor disagree	10	15.38	6	9.84
Disagree	3	4.62	2	3.28
Strongly Disagree	0	0.00	0	0.00
Total	65	100.00	61	100.00
Mean (M)		2.11		1.93

I conducted an independent t-test to analyze if there is significant difference between the two means from baseline without intervention to end line with intervention. The probability (p-value) of the t-test is greater than .05 (.159) and fails to reject the null hypothesis and I am able to conclude there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups. While the results of the independent t-test indicate there is not a statistically significant difference between the baseline and end line surveys regarding this question, it is noteworthy, however, to identify the increase of those who strongly agree from 13.85% to 22.95%. There is a drop in those who agree from 66.15% to 63.93%, but there is an overall increase of those who agree or strongly agree from 80.00% to 86.88%. It is also noteworthy to point out that no one who participated in either survey strongly disagreed with the statement, and there was a decrease in those who disagreed from 4.62% to 3.28%, and those who neither agreed nor disagreed decreased from 15.38% to 9.84%.

Question 2: How often do you see someone you would consider poor?

A second question asked on both the baseline and end line questionnaires to indicate how aware people are of these issues was measured by a five-point Likert scale in which the participant of the survey was asked: How often do you see someone you would consider poor? The options given were; never, yearly, monthly, weekly, or daily with 1 representing never, and 5 representing daily. The higher the score, the more likely the participant was to see someone they would consider poor. The baseline survey indicated 4.62% of those surveyed never see someone they would consider poor, 1.54% indicated they see someone yearly, 26.15% see someone monthly, 40.00% see someone weekly, and 27.69% see someone they would consider poor daily. When people were asked the same question in the end line survey, 1.67% indicated they never see someone they would consider poor, 0.00% see someone yearly, 21.67% see someone monthly, 46.67% see someone weekly, and 30.00% see someone they would consider poor daily.

Table 11 illustrates the responses to question 2.

Table 11. How often do you see someone you would consider poor?

	Baseline N=65		End Line N=61	
	n	%	n	%
Never	3	4.62	1	1.67
Yearly	1	1.54	0	0.00
Monthly	17	26.15	13	21.67
Weekly	26	40.00	28	46.67
Daily	18	27.69	18	30.00
Total	65	100.00	59	100.00
Mean		3.85		4.03

I conducted an independent t-test to analyze if there is significant difference between the two means from baseline without intervention to end line with intervention. The probability (p-value) of the t-test is greater than .05 (.261) and fails to reject the null hypothesis and I am able to conclude there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups. While the results of the independent t-test indicate there is not a statistically significant difference between the baseline and end line surveys regarding this question, it is noteworthy, however, to identify the increase of those who see someone they would consider poor daily from 27.69% to 30.00%, and those who see someone they would consider poor weekly from 40.00% to 46.67%. That is an increase from those who see someone they would consider poor daily or weekly from 67.69% to 76.67%. It is also noteworthy to point out the decrease in those who never see someone they would consider poor from 4.62% to 1.67%, and those who see someone yearly decreased from 1.54% to 0.00%. That is a decrease in those who see someone they would consider poor yearly or never from 6.16% to 1.67%.

Question 3: As Lutherans/Christians we are called to feed the hungry.

A third question asked on both the baseline and end line questionnaires to indicate how aware people are of these issues was measured by a Likert scale in which the participant of the survey was asked if they agree with the statement: As Lutherans/Christians we are called to feed the hungry. The options given were strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with 1 representing strongly agree and 5 representing strongly disagree. The lower the score, the stronger the participant agreed with the statement. The baseline survey indicated 56.92% strongly agreed, 40.00% agreed, 3.08% neither agreed nor disagreed, 0.00% disagreed, and 0.00%

strongly disagreed. When people were asked the same question in the end line survey, 67.21% strongly agreed, 32.79% agreed, 0.00% neither agreed nor disagreed, 0.00% disagreed, and 0.00% strongly disagreed. Table 12 illustrates the responses to question 3.

Table 12. As Lutherans/Christians we are called to feed the hungry.

	Baseline N=65		End Line N=61	
	n	%	n	%
Strongly Agree	37	56.92	41	67.21
Agree	26	40.00	20	32.79
Neither agree nor disagree	2	3.08	0	0.00
Disagree	0	0.00	0	0.00
Strongly Disagree	0	0.00	0	0.00
Total	65	100.00	61	100.00
Mean		1.46		1.32

I conducted an independent t-test to analyze if there is significant difference between the two means from baseline without intervention to end line with intervention. The probability (p-value) of the t-test is greater than .05 (.122) and fails to reject the null hypothesis and I am able to conclude there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups. While the results of the independent t-test indicate there is not a statistically significant difference between the baseline and end line surveys regarding this question, it is noteworthy, however, to identify the increase of those who strongly agree from 56.92% to 67.21%. Although there is a drop in those who agree from 40.00% to 32.79%, there is an overall increase of those who agree or strongly agree from 96.92% to 100.00%. It is also noteworthy to point out that no one who participated in either survey disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, and there was a decrease in

those who neither agreed nor disagreed decreased from 3.08%% to 0.00%. All (100.00%) of those who participated in the end line survey agree or strongly agree that as Lutherans/Christians we are called to feed the hungry.

Question 4: How many people do you know in Hill Town that struggle financially?

A fourth question asked on both the baseline and end line questionnaires to indicate how aware people are of these issues was measured by a Likert scale in which the participant of the survey was asked: How many people do you know in Hill Town that struggle financially? The options given were 0, 1-5, 6-10, 11-20, or more than 20, with 1 representing 0 and 5 representing more than 20. The higher the score, the more people the participant knows who struggle financially. The baseline survey indicated 15.38% of those surveyed do not know anyone who struggles financially, 18.46% indicated they know between one and five people, 24.62% know between six and ten people, 6.15% know between eleven and twenty, and 35.38% know more than twenty people in Hill Town that struggle financially. When people were asked the same question in the end line survey, 11.86% of those surveyed indicated they do not know anyone who struggles financially, 27.12% indicated they know between one and five people, 15.25% know between six and ten people, 8.47% know between eleven and twenty, and 37.29% know more than twenty people in Hill Town that struggle financially. Table 13 illustrates responses to question 4.

Table 13. How many people do you know in Hill Town that struggle financially?

	Baseline N=65		End Line N=61	
	n	%	n	%
0	10	15.38	7	11.86
1-5	12	18.46	16	27.12
6-10	16	24.62	9	15.25
11-20	4	6.15	5	8.47
More than 20	23	35.38	22	37.29
Total	65	100.00	59	100.00
Mean		3.28		3.34

I conducted an independent t-test to analyze if there is significant difference between the two means from baseline without intervention to end line with intervention. The probability (p-value) of the t-test is greater than .05 (.802) and fails to reject the null hypothesis, and I am able to conclude there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups. While the results of the independent t-test indicate there is not a statistically significant difference between the baseline and end line surveys regarding this question, it is noteworthy, however, to identify the increase of those who know between eleven and twenty people in Hill Town who struggle financially from 6.15% to 8.47%. There was also an increase in those who know more than twenty people who in Hill Town who struggle financially from 35.38% to 37.29%. That is an increase in those who know eleven or more people in Hill Town that struggle financially from 41.53% to 45.76%. It is also noteworthy to point out the decrease in those who indicated that they do not know anyone in Hill Town who struggles financially from 15.38% to 11.86%.

Question 5: What percentage of the students at Hill Town Elementary School qualify for free or reduced lunch?

A fifth question asked on both the baseline and end line questionnaires to indicate how aware people are of these issues was measured by a Likert scale in which the participant of the survey was asked: What percentage of the students at Hill Town Elementary School qualify for free or reduced lunch? The options given were less than 5%, between 5-10%, between 11-20%, between 21-30%, or more than 30%, with 1 representing less than 5% and 5 representing more than 30%. The baseline survey indicated 1.67% believed it was less than 5% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch, 11.67% indicated they thought between 5-10%, 30.00% believed between 11-20%, 35.00% indicated between 21-30%, and 21.67% thought more than 30% of the students at Hill Town Elementary School qualify for free or reduced lunch. When people were asked the same question in the end line survey, 0.00% believed it to be less than 5% of the students, 11.86% thought it to be between 5-10%, 22.03% believed it was between 11-20%, 30.51% thought it was between 21-30%, and 35.59% believed it was more than 30% of the students at Hill Town Elementary School that qualify for free or reduced lunch. Table 14 illustrates the responses to question 5.

Table 14. What percentage of the students at Hill Town Elementary School qualify for free or reduced lunch?

	Baseline N=65		End Line N=61	
	n	%	n	%
Less than 5%	1	1.67	0	0.00
Between 5-10%	7	11.67	7	11.86
Between 11-20%	18	30.00	13	22.03
Between 21-30%	21	35.00	18	30.51
More than 30%	13	21.67	21	35.59
Total	60	100.00	59	100.00
Mean		3.63		3.88

I conducted an independent t-test to analyze if there is significant difference between the two means from baseline without intervention to end line with intervention. The probability (p-value) of the t-test is greater than .05 (.192) and fails to reject the null hypothesis and I am able to conclude there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups. While the results of the independent t-test indicate there is not a statistically significant difference between the baseline and end line surveys regarding this question, it is noteworthy, however, to identify the increase of those who know there is more than 30% of the students at Hill Town Elementary School that qualify for free or reduced lunch, from 21.67% to 35.59%.

Question 6: Name three things God already is doing in and through this congregation and community to feed the hungry.

A sixth question was asked on the baseline and end line questionnaires in which participants were asked to name three things God already is doing in and through this

congregation and community to feed the hungry. On the baseline questionnaire, 82.81% of the participants were able to name three things. On the end line questionnaire, 91.80% participants were able to name at least three things that God is already doing in and through this congregation and community to feed the hungry.

Qualitative Results

Qualitative data analysis gets at the depth of the research. Kathy Charmaz's *Constructing Grounded Theory* provided a practical step by step guide for qualitative analysis. Using Charmaz's process for coding qualitative data I conducted coding through four main phases: initial coding, focused coding, axial coding, and theoretical coding. Table 15 describes each coding phase. This process of coding was used to code the four interviews, four focus groups from the interventions, and to code the fill in the blank questions from both the baseline and end line surveys.

Table 15. Qualitative Data Analysis

Coding Phase	Description
Initial Coding	Identifying specific language and specific terms line-by-line to create <i>in vivo</i> codes.
Focused Coding	Identifying the most significant and/or frequent codes and collecting similar <i>in vivo</i> codes into categories.
Axial Coding	The process of developing subcategories by grouping focused codes.
Theoretical Coding	Identifying possible relationships between categories developed in your axial coding.

Initial Coding

Four interviews were conducted with four willing participants selected by purposive/informed sampling who had experienced or were experiencing poverty with at least one youth or child in the household. I selected parents and/or guardians who are 18 years old and older. I selected these participants based on prior conversations initiated by the subject. I transcribed these interviews with help from my research team and Temi transcription software. I also used Temi to transcribe the recording from all four intervention focus groups. I used the transcription from Survey Monkey for the fill in the blank questions from both the baseline and end line surveys. From the transcriptions, initial codes were gathered. These initial codes were used to generate 361 *in vivo* codes from the interviews, 146 *in vivo* codes from the focus groups, 329 *in vivo* codes from baseline survey, and 333 *in vivo* codes from the end line survey, for a total of 1,169 *in vivo* codes. All *in vivo* codes are listed on appendix E. The *in vivo* codes were reviewed and grouped into 35 focused codes.

Focused Coding

Focused coding is more directed, selective, and conceptual than the initial coding. I used the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through the large amounts of data from the transcripts. By using the participants' own words from *in vivo* codes I clustered similar words, phrases, statements, and ideas into focused codes. I did this process of focusing these codes several times, narrowing down the data to thirty-five focused codes. Table 16 names the thirty-five focused codes.

Table 16. Focused Codes

Focused Codes
Shame/Judgement
Insider/Outsider
Public/Private
Transportation
Health
Single Parenting
Housing
Food
Food Stamps
Healthy Food/Nutrition
Pride
Clothing/clean
Physical Capabilities
Division (Us and Them)
Fear
Training
Children
Child-care
Taking advantage of others
Addiction
Giving Help
Gifts/having nice things
Effort/Trying
Hiding/Silent/Invisible
Education
Generational Poverty
Health
Work/vocation
Education
Government Programs
Church
Community
Family
Friends & Neighbors
School

Axial Coding

Axial coding is the process of developing subcategories focusing on process rather than themes. Axial coding reassembles the data dissected during initial coding to give coherence to the emerging analysis. From this process emerged four axial codes.

Table 17 displays the axial codes and the corresponding focused codes.

Table 17. Axial Coding

Axial Code	Corresponding Focused Code
Challenges of Poverty	Shame/Judgement Insider/Outsider Public/Private Transportation Health Single Parenting Housing Food Food Stamps Healthy Food/Nutrition Pride Clothing/clean Physical Capabilities Division (Us and Them) Fear Training Children Child-care
Stereotypes of Poverty	Taking advantage of others Addiction Giving Help Gifts/having nice things Effort/Trying Hiding/Silent/Invisible Education
Causes of Poverty	Generational Poverty Health Work/vocation Education
Possible Solutions/Help	Government Programs Church Community Family Friends & Neighbors School

Theoretical Coding

Theoretical coding follows the axial codes specifying possible relationships between categories developed in axial coding. Theoretical coding gives form to the axial codes already collected and moves the story in theoretical direction. The theoretical coding families include causes of poverty, challenges of poverty, stereotypes of poverty, and possible solutions and help. In conversation with hunger advocates, focus groups, colleagues, and other people who want to help, I have discovered that people all too often move too quickly to actions and/or solutions. The relationship between these categories is complex and we need to dwell in the other categories of theological coding.

In chapter 3 I presented a biblical lens from Matthew 25, “I was hungry and you gave me food.” I used the analogy that if our neighbor’s house is on fire, the first thing we do is extinguish the fire. Later, we will determine what caused the fire, how to rebuild, and how to prevent more fires. We have people in our community who are in need. As people of faith we are called to feed the hungry, to provide drink, to welcome the stranger, to clothe the naked, to care for the sick, and to visit the imprisoned. The first thing we need to do is provide initial help, extinguish the fire, and feed the hungry. Feeding the hungry, however, is more than providing a meal. The meal is important, but now is the time to determine what caused the fire, how to rebuild, and how to prevent more fires.

Although it is important to dwell in all theoretical categories before moving too quickly to solution, the relationship between these categories is not simply a step by step process. The process is much more like a dance than it is a step by step process. The first thing we need to do is provide initial help by feeding the hungry. After providing initial

help we enter the dance of exploring causes of poverty, challenges of poverty, and stereotypes of poverty. To better understand causes of poverty helps better understand challenges and stereotypes. Likewise, understanding challenges helps understand causes and stereotypes. When we are able to recognize stereotypes, we are able to recognize causes and challenges. As this dance continues between causes, challenges, and stereotypes, we are able to see possible help and solutions. This is not a step by step process. Once we have reached possible help and solutions we enter back into the dance of causes, challenges, and stereotypes and the dance continues as we seek new possible help and solutions. See figure 2.

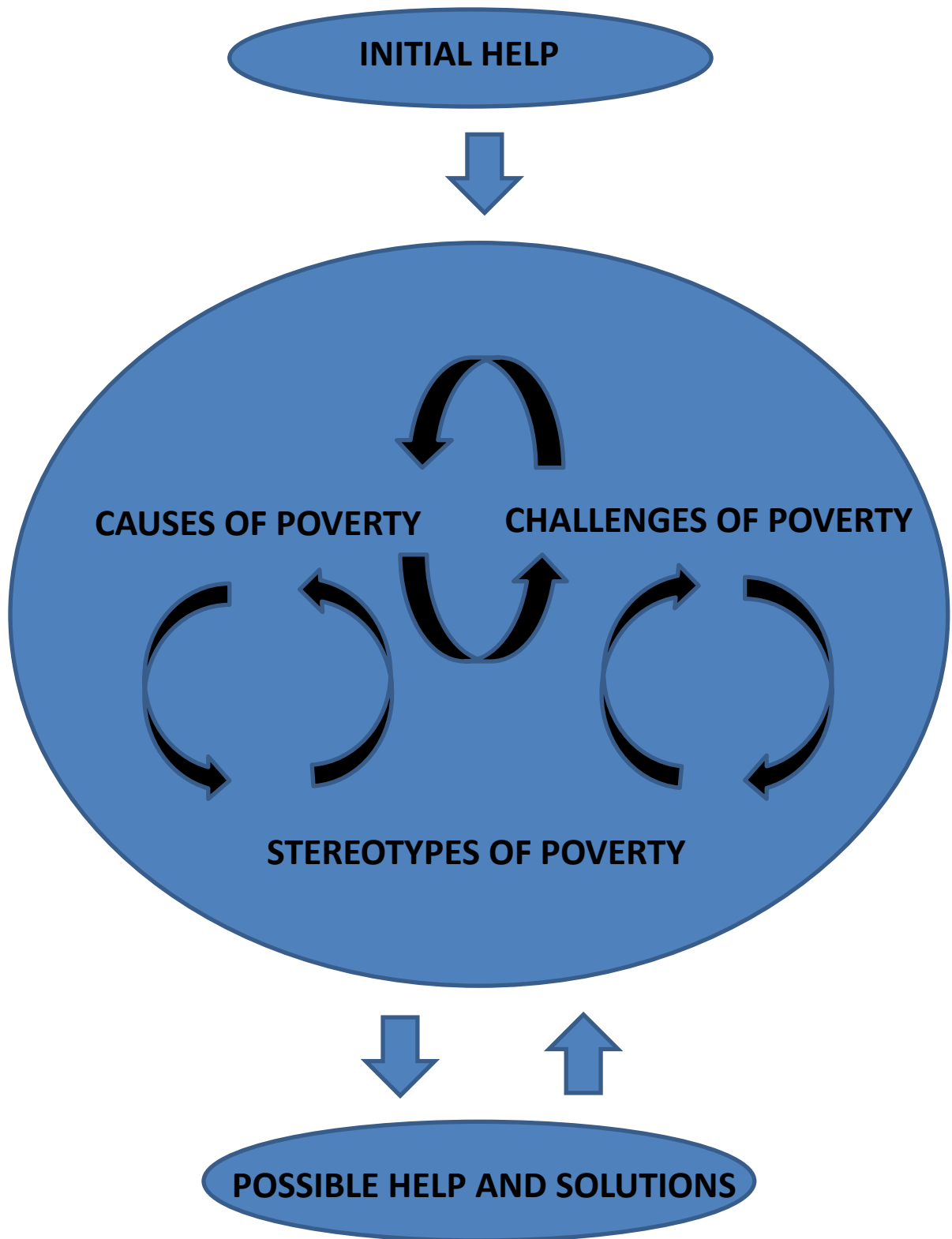


Figure 2. Theoretical Coding

Quantitative and Qualitative Relationship

Whereas the quantitative statistical analysis gets at the breadth of the research, qualitative data analysis gets at the depth of the research. The findings of the quantitative results and the qualitative results of this project relate and support each other in a variety of ways, including, listening, seeing, privacy, and addiction.

Listening

The qualitative statistical analysis from the interview *in vivo* codes show the importance of listening. All four of the people interviewed about living in poverty name how important it is to be listened to and heard. They said:

- I think people need to hear what I have to say about low class families with working.
- I couldn't even believe I said these things because I was very insecure back then, but I said, "Why are you even on a board like this if you're not here to listen to the people?"
- Okay. I'm listening. . . and it made the difference.
- If people would actually listen to what I'm telling you right now and maybe understand where I'm coming from and my family's coming from and what we're trying to do with nothing.
- Nobody wants to hear the ugly side of things.
- It is truly devastating and they're suffering in silence.

The quantitative statistical analysis supports these findings. When people listened to accurate information and stories about rural small-town poverty, awareness was raised, attitudes changed, and action increased. After the interventions, there was an increase of those who agreed or strongly agreed that we have an issue with poverty in Hill Town (from 80.00% to 86.88%). By being better informed, the quantitative results indicate we

are more apt to see someone they would consider poor daily or weekly (from 67.69% to 76.67%). The end line survey indicated an increase in the percent of participants who know eleven or more people in Hill Town that struggle financially (from 41.53% to 45.76%). From the baseline survey to the end line survey, more people were able to accurately identify that more than 30% of our students qualify for free or reduced lunch (from 21.67% to 35.59%). The findings of both the quantitative results and the qualitative results of this project indicate that listening and hearing accurate information raises awareness of the issues concerning small-town rural poverty.

Seeing

Another result supported both quantitatively and qualitatively is the reality that people *choose* to not see poverty. It is evident that people's willingness to listen raises awareness, changes attitudes, and increases action. It is also evident that people choose to not look at all. The qualitative results reveal this reality with statements like:

- People start looking at you and they start turning away.
- I realized that there's this huge problem of lack of information and basic understanding of what is poverty.
- I could feel myself disappearing.
- She didn't look the stereotype.
- There's a look. It's really subliminal, but it's there.

The quantitative results show that even after presented with all of the statistics, stories, and realities two people surveyed at the end line disagreed that we have an issue with poverty, hunger, and/or homelessness in Hill Town. Both of these people participated in at least one intervention and indicated their awareness increased because

of the intervention/s. They both, however, estimated high on their average age of homelessness and estimated low on how many local students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Both participants participated in the sermon intervention. Accurate information about the percentage of local students who qualify for free or reduced lunch and the average age of homelessness were presented in the sermon intervention. Another person indicated on the end line survey that they participated in three of the four interventions and agree we have an issue with poverty, hunger, and/or homelessness in Hill Town but also indicted the never see someone who they would consider poor.

Privacy

Another result supported by both the qualitative and quantitative statistical analysis has to do with privacy. Chapter 2 named small-town mentality as a theoretical lens in which every small-town has its own unique identity shaped by people, experiences, geography, and culture. Yet there tend to be some common themes that run through most small-towns. One of these themes is privacy, or lack thereof. A finding that grew out of this study was a public/private dichotomy that exists simultaneously. There is a public nature to living in a small-town in which it seems like everyone knows everyone, everyone knows everyone's business, and privacy seems to be a foreign concept. There is also a private nature to small-town living in which people do not share or exemplify their socio-economic status. This is often the case for people who are wealthy and for people who are not. For people living in poverty, this was expressed through the qualitative results in which people said:

- We don't want to tell people, we have to keep it a secret, it's the dirty little secret.

- It has to be a secret because people will think less of me.
- People look down on people like me
- I think that what you've got about invisible and poverty is really the core of the whole issue of poverty.
- I think that we can be on the brink of destitution or just simply struggling, but we still put on our, our good clothes, we still put our makeup on or comb our hair, and we still go out there and we present ourselves that everything is great.
- Everything's fine. Everything's wonderful so that nobody would know. We can remain invisible.
- I think anybody who is in a poverty situation, we don't want to tell people.
- You know, people in that small-town mentality, it feels like everybody's talking about it. And to an extent, they are.

This small-town mentality concerning privacy is also supported in the quantitative statistical analysis. When asked on the baseline questionnaire about total income, four people (6.15%) indicated “I would rather not say”. When asked about the value of their total assets, 8 people (12.70%) indicated “I would rather not say”. When asked on the end line questionnaire about total income, 8 people (13.11%) chose to not say. When asked about the value of their total assets, 10 people (16.39%) did not disclose.

Addiction

Another result supported by both the qualitative and quantitative statistical analysis has to do with addiction. In the qualitative statistical analysis, people living in poverty named the assumption that they were poor because they were spending their money on drugs and alcohol. The interviewees said:

- The first prejudice is the belief by many that people who are on social welfare programs do so because they don't want to work and they want to stay home and do drugs or get drunk or just don't want to work.

- So then, then the question becomes, but if they are a drug addict, does that mean then that their life that as a human being is any less valued or that their children's lives are any less valued because they have an addiction problem?
- The growing number of people who are on social welfare programs are 65 years old and older. So then what that tells you is that's not drugs. That's not alcohol. That is people who are reaching their bona fide retirement age and they still aren't making enough money.
- A man stood up and said that those people living down there, they hang out at the bars all the time. They're getting knocked up and they don't work. I stood up, being shy and quiet, and I said, excuse me, I said, I work full time. I've never been to the bar.
- I wasn't hanging around in the bars. I wasn't going out. My kids never had a babysitter until they were in third and fifth grade.

These results are also supported in the quantitative statistical analysis. When people were asked to describe someone in poverty, homeless, or to give reasons people become poor, the most common response on both the baseline and end line survey was addiction. Addiction, drugs, and alcohol were named fifty-four times in the baseline survey and thirty-three times in the end line survey.

The intent of this project was to better engage and serve the real issues, problems, and struggles concerning poverty in our community and world. The changes we were hoping to see were increased awareness, informed attitudes, and faithful action to provide basic essentials of life. Chapter 5 presented the results of the research and data collected. Chapter 6 provides conclusions with theoretical and theological reflection providing a summary of results, identifying what was important about the findings, viewing the findings through the biblical, theological, and theoretical lenses and literature, and describing the possible implications of the research. Chapter 6 also identifies questions and ideas for future research that grow out of this study.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS WITH THEORETICAL AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Chapter 5 presented the results of the research and data collected. Chapter 6 provides conclusions with theoretical and theological reflection providing a summary of results, identifying what was important about the findings, viewing the findings through the biblical, theological, and theoretical lenses and literature, and describing the possible implications of the research by following the four tasks of action guiding praxis. This chapter also identifies questions and ideas for future research that have grown out of the research question: *How might Action Research interventions affect awareness, attitudes, and actions of the congregation concerning the issues of poverty?*

One of the theoretical lenses identified in chapter 2 was praxis. Praxis is the process in which an idea, theory, lesson, or skill is enacted, embodied, applied, realized or practiced. Richard Osmer provides action-guiding praxis by proposing a model of practical theological interpretation with four tasks: The descriptive-empirical task asks, ‘What is going on?’ The interpretive task asks, ‘Why is it going on?’ The normative task asks, ‘What must we do?’ The pragmatic task asks, ‘How do we get there?’ This chapter presents conclusions with theoretical and theological reflection by following these four tasks.

Descriptive-empirical task, ‘What is going on?’

The descriptive-empirical task asks, ‘What is going on?’ Last year, a regional food bank, through their partner network of food pantries, emergency meal programs, and other community partners, served 97,170 people, of which 36% were children and 12% were seniors.

- 34% report choosing between paying for food and paying for medicine/medical care
- 69% of clients couldn’t afford to eat balanced meals
- 44% report choosing between paying for food and paying for utilities
- 34% report making choices between paying for food and paying for transportation
- 35% report choosing between paying for food and paying for housing
- 75% of clients had at least one chronic disease, and 84% of those clients reported living with more than one chronic disease¹

Based on interviews conducted by the food bank in our region, of those struggling with hunger 26% are children, 15% are seniors, and 18% are veterans. Concerning education, 82% completed high school, 51% have two or more years of post-secondary education, and 8% have completed college. Concerning housing, 78% have secured permanent housing, 16% are living in temporary housing, and 6% are homeless. Of those interviewed, 86% of the participants have a chronic disease, 6% indicate they are in poor or very poor health, and 61% have unpaid medical bills. Some of the specific health concerns include 33% of the participants have high blood pressure, 31% have depression or some kind of mental health issue, 29% have diabetes, 18% have asthma, 14% are obese, and 12% suffer from addiction. Many of the participants are forced to choose between food and other essentials of life. Of those interviewed, 62% of the households

¹ Melissa Sobolik, “Ending Hunger 2.0 : Overview,” accessed December 7, 2019, [HTTPS://www.endinghunger20.org](https://www.endinghunger20.org).

report choosing between food and medicine or medical care, 54% choose between food and housing, 54% choose between food and utilities, and 49% choose between food and gas for transportation.²

In this state, 55,710 people are struggling with hunger—and of them 16,440 are children. That means one in eleven children in the state struggles with hunger.³ In this state, 28,700, or about 9% of the households do not have enough food for a healthy and active lifestyle. The rate shows a gradual increase over the past 10 years. Many of these households reside in rural areas. The state lost about 20% of its grocery stores in towns with fewer than 2100 people. The term food desert describes areas where people live without ready access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food. This map from Rural Grocer Initiative shows areas where food deserts exist. The green areas show where people live ten or fewer miles from a grocery store. The pink areas show where people live more than ten miles from a grocery store. Orange areas show where community or cooperatively owned stores exist (see figure 3).

² Sobolik.

³ “Facts About Hunger and Poverty in America | Feeding America.”

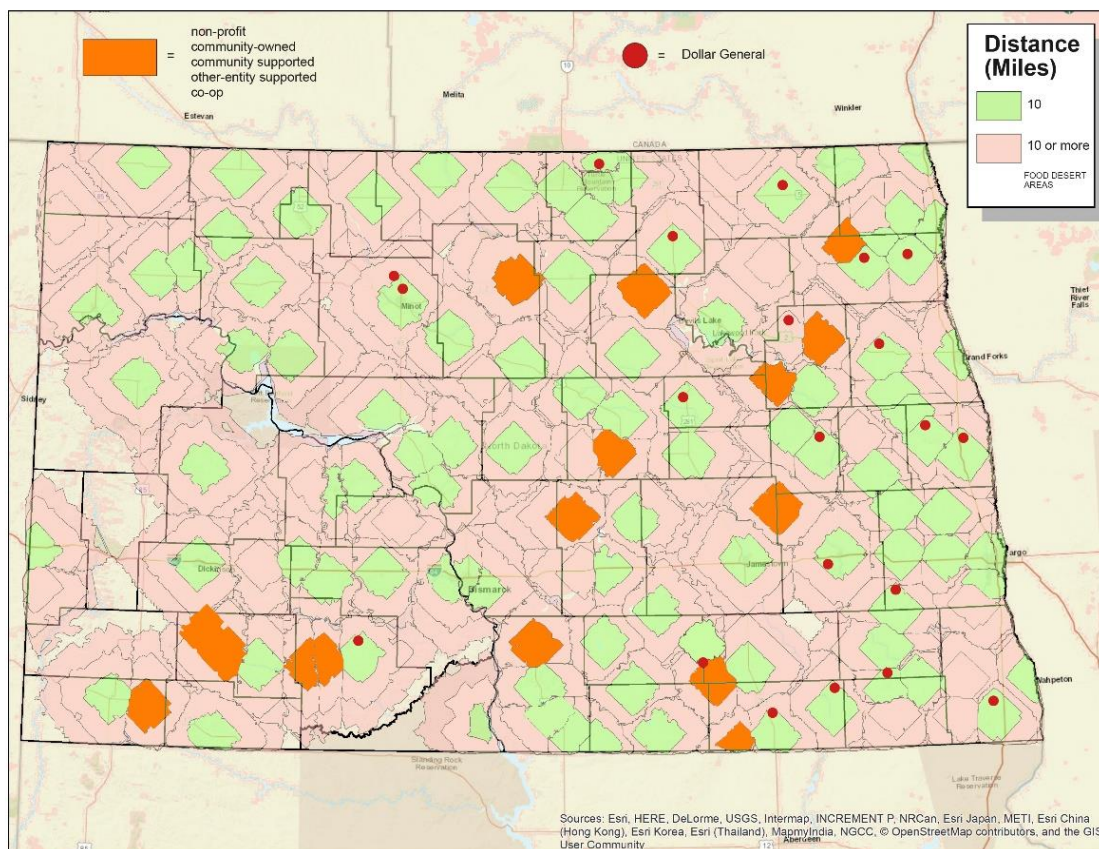


Figure 3. Food Desert Map

These regional and statewide statistics concerning poverty are reflected locally in our county and town. Of the 8037 residents of the county, 7.70% live in poverty⁴ and 9.80% of the children in the county are food insecure.⁵ This year in Hill Town 32% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. The problem of hunger is not just for someone else somewhere else.

When discerning this research project I compiled a list of twenty-two people who met the criteria to be interviewed. Those twenty-two people had a total of seventy-three

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, “American FactFinder - Results.”

⁵ “Facts About Hunger and Poverty in America | Feeding America.”

people living in their households. That makes up 3.23% of the town's population. Based on this information we are able to definitively conclude poverty exists in our community.

Awareness

One of the aims of this research project was to evaluate the awareness of poverty in Hill Town. To evaluate *awareness* of the congregation concerning the issues of poverty, six questions were asked on both the baseline and end line questionnaires. The first question asked was measured by a Likert scale in which the participant of the survey was asked to strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the statement: We have an issue with poverty, hunger, and/or homelessness in Hill Town. The baseline survey indicated 13.85% strongly agreed with the statement. After raising awareness through the four interventions, people were asked the same question in the end line survey and 22.95% strongly agreed. The baseline survey indicated 80.00% of the participants either strongly agreed or agreed that we have an issue with poverty, hunger, and/or homelessness in Hill town. On the end line survey 86.88% of those who participated either strongly agreed or agreed.

A second question asked on both the baseline and end line questionnaires to indicate how aware people are aware of these issues was measured by a Likert scale in which the participant of the survey was asked: How often do you see someone you would consider poor? The options given were; never, yearly, monthly, weekly, or daily. The baseline survey indicated 67.69% of the people see someone they would consider poor weekly or daily (40.00% weekly, 27.69% daily). After raising awareness through the four interventions, people were asked the same question in the end line survey and 76.67% of

the people indicated they see someone they would consider poor weekly or daily (46.67% weekly, 30.00% daily).

A third question asked on both the baseline and end line questionnaires to indicate how aware people are of these issues was measured by a Likert scale in which the participant of the survey was asked to strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the statement: As Lutherans/Christians we are called to feed the hungry. The baseline survey indicated 96.92% either agreed or strongly agreed (56.92% strongly agreed, 40.00% agreed). When asked the same question on the end line survey 100.00% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed (67.21% strongly agreed, 32.79% agreed).

A fourth question asked on both the baseline and end line questionnaires to indicate how aware people are of these issues was measured by a Likert scale in which the participant of the survey was asked: How many people do you know in Hill Town that struggle financially? The options given were 0, 1-5, 6-10, 11-20, or more than 20. The baseline survey indicated 41.53% of those surveyed knew at least 11 people who struggle financially (6.15% know between eleven and twenty, and 35.38% know more than twenty). When asked the same question on the end line survey, 45.76% of the people indicated they know at least 11 people who struggle financially (8.47% know between eleven and twenty, and 37.29% know more than twenty).

A fifth question asked on both the baseline and end line questionnaires to indicate how aware people are of these issues was: What percentage of the students at Hill Town Elementary School qualify for free or reduced lunch? The options given were less than 5%, between 5-10%, between 11-20%, between 21-30%, or more than 30%. The baseline

survey indicated 21.67% thought more than 30% of the students at Hill Town Elementary School qualify for free or reduced lunch. When people were asked the same question in the end line survey, 35.59% believed it was more than 30% of the students at Hill Town Elementary School that qualify for free or reduced lunch.

A sixth question was asked on the baseline and end line questionnaires in which participants were asked to name three things God already is doing in and through this congregation and community to feed the hungry. On the baseline survey, only 82.81% of the participants were able to name three things that God is already doing in and through this congregation and community to feed the hungry. In the sermon intervention I pointed out twenty-nine things God is already doing, including the regional food bank, local food pantry, elementary school backpack program, Community Cares Emergency Fund, local churches, friendship free exchange box, caring individuals, veterans services, county public health, social services, local businesses, local law enforcement, local schools, care center hospital and assisted living, regional shelters, senior citizens center, and meals on wheels. I pointed out the things God is already doing in and through Community Lutheran Church, including Foods Resource Bank, emergency food distribution, feeding 5,000 meals served on Wednesdays, WELCA (Women of the E.L.C.A.) sponsored groups, pastor's discretionary fund, Operation Christmas Child, world-wide quilt distribution, youth mission trips, youth service projects, parish nursing, and the health ministry team. On the end line survey, 91.80% participants were able to name at least three things that God is already doing in and through this congregation and community to feed the hungry.

As reported in chapter 5, these questions do not show statistically significant differences from baseline to end line. What is important, however, is that all six of the questions concerning awareness of poverty indicate increased awareness. This means the interventions were successful in raising awareness of the congregation concerning poverty in Hill Town. When asked at the end line survey, 88.52% of the participants indicated a change in awareness, attitude, and action concerning poverty. Based on this research, as a congregation we are more aware of poverty, food insecurity, and homelessness after the four interventions.

Attitudes

To evaluate *attitudes* of the congregation concerning the issues of poverty three fill in the blank questions were asked on both the baseline and end line questionnaires. The first question asked was: *When you think about someone in poverty, what are three words that come to mind?* On the baseline survey people used the words elderly, dirty, old, lazy, shabby, irresponsible, beard, poor clothing, and pitiful. On the end line survey people used the words: strong, malnourished, health issues, separated, unfair, food insecurity, and invisible.

The second question asked to evaluate *attitudes* of the congregation concerning the issues of poverty was: *Who do you picture or imagine when you hear "homeless"?* On the baseline survey people used words describing appearance including: un-kept, poorly dressed, dirty, bums, people living on the street, someone sleeping on the street, bridges, drug addicts, street people, disheveled appearance, adults to include elderly, pan handlers, dirty clothes, men, shabby clothes, poor hygiene, people who can't manage money, tattered, scrubby clothes, and beard. While the end line survey included some of

the same words, it also included: families, anyone (could happen to any of us), a person moving a lot, young, families in autos, children, hardworking, any age, runaway teens, troubled homes, single parents, and extenuating circumstances.

The third question asked to evaluate *attitudes* of the congregation concerning the issues of poverty was: *Give two reasons you think people become poor.* On the baseline survey people responded: laziness, buy things not needed, poor management, habits, addictions to a bad habit, life choices (drugs/alcohol/addiction), priorities are mixed up, poor choices, laziness when it comes to wanting to work, and unmotivated. The participants of the baseline survey named habits, choices, and addictions as the cause of poverty thirty-four times. While the end line survey used some of the same words, it also included: inequality, medical expenses, sickness, unexpected life events, lack of opportunity, single parent, lack of affordable childcare, and mental health. The participants of the end line survey named habits, choices, and addictions as the cause of poverty twenty-nine times. Based on this research, from these questions asked on both the baseline and end line questionnaires, as a congregation we have experienced a shift in attitude concerning poverty, food insecurity, and homelessness.

Actions

To evaluate the congregation's willingness to take *action* concerning the issues of poverty, participants were asked on both the baseline and end line questionnaires to answer yes or no to the question: If there is an issue with poverty, hunger, and/or homelessness, are you willing to help? The baseline survey indicated 98.46% responded yes. When asked the same question on the end line questionnaire 100.00% of the participants were willing to help. As reported in chapter 5, 100.00% of those who

participated in the end line survey agreed or strongly agreed that as Lutherans/Christians we are called to feed the hungry. Everyone who participated in the end line survey recognized we are called to feed the hungry and they were willing to take action to help with issues of poverty, hunger, and/or homelessness. It is clearly established we have people who struggle with poverty, hunger, and/or homelessness. It is clearly established we have people who are willing to help. Now the question is, how do we build relationship between the people who need help and the people willing to help? The third and fourth task of this action-guiding praxis will get specifically at this question, but first we will address the interpretive task and ask, ‘Why is it going on?’

Interpretive task, ‘Why is it going on?’

Now that we are aware of *what* is going on, we engage in the interpretive task asking, ‘Why is it going on?’ I got at this question by studying fields of literature, external studies, organizations within the local community, and interviews with people who had experienced or were experiencing poverty.

While population explosion, lack of infrastructure, corruption, natural disaster, political instability, and war are contributing causes of global poverty, causes of poverty in small-town rural America can look considerably different. When asking why poverty exists in this context, it is important to distinguish between the realities of poverty and stereotypes. When people were asked in the baseline and end line surveys to give reasons why people become poor, some stereotypes surfaced. Some of these stereotypes included laziness, unwilling to work, lack of education, and addiction. I am not suggesting these things are not factors or even causes of poverty, but I am arguing that it is unfair to make assumptions about people who are living in poverty assuming they are poor because they

are lazy or unwilling to work, have made bad decisions, are uneducated, or struggle with an addiction.

Stereotypes

Laziness/Unwilling to Work

When participants of the baseline survey were asked to give reasons people become poor, *laziness* and *unwilling to work* were named. Scott J. Higgins works as a consultant, educator and writer with a particular focus upon social justice and ethics from a Christian faith-based perspective. Higgins worked with Baptist World Aid for 10 years and has identified the number one myth of poverty is that people are poor because they are lazy. Higgins argues, “The reality is that people who are poor more often than not have plenty of initiative but lack opportunity. They live in economies that don’t generate sufficient jobs and where wealth is captured by an elite; experience poor health, infrastructure and education; are frequently the object of discrimination.”⁶

From a biblical perspective, people who believe the poor are lazy often quote Proverbs 10:4, “A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.” Like always, it is important to read the text in its entirety. Can laziness lead to poverty? Yes, it can. To say laziness leads to poverty and hard work leads to wealth is generally true, but it does not tell the whole story, especially for those who are marginalized, oppressed, discriminated against, disabled, elderly, or children. Thus, we also find these

⁶ “Myths About Poverty. Myth #1 – People Are Poor Because They’re Lazy – Scottjhiggins.Com,” <https://scottjhiggins.com/myths-about-poverty-myth-1-people-are-poor-because-theyre-lazy/> (accessed December 9, 2019).

sayings in Proverbs that suggest poverty is often the result of injustice and the one living in poverty is not lazy, and can be quite blameless in character;

- Proverbs 13:23-An unplowed field produces food for the poor, but injustice sweeps it away
- Proverbs 19:1-Better the poor whose walk is blameless than a fool whose lips are perverse
- Proverbs 28:3-A ruler who oppresses the poor is like a driving rain that leaves no crops
- Proverbs 29:7-The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern

The participants of the interviews conducted in this research all talked about this stereotype of laziness. This is what they had to say:

- My parents never had any money but worked hard.
- You're still struggling even if you are working.
- I live in housing but I have a job.
- Because you live there, you're stereotyped because it's low income housing. What people don't understand is the rent is high if you're paying full rent.
- But this stereotype of low income families is bad because people look down on people like me for instance, but they don't understand. My mom worked two jobs to support us and that still wasn't enough.
- My mom worked two jobs when I was growing up. I had to babysit my sisters when I was very young so she could work. Yeah. We stayed with my grandma a lot too.
- They are nowhere near lazy. I get disability so I didn't have a job for a while. People could say I was lazy, but I wasn't lazy. I was busy getting better with other issues. Now that I have a job, I'm not lazy, I go to work.
- People aren't lazy in lower class. You go to work just to pay childcare.
- I'm poor, I'm going to school. I'm bettering myself. I'm working full time.

- I went to school at night and I, I worked during the day. I pulled 40 hours a week and I worked like a dog for two years until I got that diploma.
- I was making \$7.16 an hour as a lead teacher which comes out to about \$800 a month. My daycare bill was \$750.
- I have never not worked full time.
- I kept working full time.
- Before the cancer, I was supporting my family wonderfully.

Lack of Education

Education is a major factor concerning poverty. Lack of education is a key component as a cause of poverty and attaining education is a key component in working out of poverty. At first glance, it might seem like a strange topic to name as a stereotype. The reason education is listed as a stereotype is because it is unfair to assume that someone living in poverty does not have an education. Of the clients interviewed by the food bank, 82% had completed high school. 51% have two plus years of post-secondary education. By all means, education is a vital component concerning the issues of poverty. We cannot, however, assume someone living in poverty is not educated.

One of the powerful moments of this research project was a conversation that happened during the service project intervention. We had unloaded a semi-truck trailer of food and we were giving it away. In between loading food for clients the volunteers would have conversation. As we were talking about hunger and poverty, inevitably, the conversation turned to my research and thesis. One of the volunteers asked me, “I wonder, how much of this food that we are giving away will be wasted? How do we get *these people* to understand? How do we educate them to make better decisions, to take more responsibility, to work harder so they don’t have to come here and get free food?”

There were a few points in his question that I wanted and needed to respond to. Now remember, this was a volunteer, doing good work. This volunteer is already aware and taking action, but I had concern about the attitude. So I responded to his question about how to educate. I named partnerships and education programs that already exist. I named church activities that are already in place. Then, I challenged him to think beyond educating clients and recognizing that we as volunteers also have a lot to learn. For example, the numerous people I knew who were receiving food that day had incredibly powerful stories. One man had recently lost his wife unexpectedly. He was raising their children alone and working full time. Another woman had been battling cancer and was unable to work. Several of the people I knew were elderly and I could see the discomfort in receiving free food. I respectfully challenged this other volunteer to think beyond words like *these people* or *those people*. This language tends to be divisive and unhelpful. Are some of the recipients of the food distribution in need of education, job training, and learning? Yes, but so are we as volunteers. All of us as clients and volunteers have something to learn and something to teach.

Addiction

When people were asked to give reasons people become poor, the most common response on both the baseline and end line questionnaires was addiction. I have often heard people dismiss helping the poor arguing that the person in poverty probably spends all their money on drugs and/or alcohol. Addictive behavior is certainly a factor in the poverty conversation. Addiction, however, is often over-stated as a leading cause of poverty. From a missional ecclesiological perspective, should we dismiss helping someone because they are struggling with an addiction? I argue the opposite. The very

definition of an addiction is that a person cannot help themselves. It is imperative for the church to engage in issues of addiction, recovery, and treatment.

Last year, a regional food bank through their partner network of food pantries, emergency meal programs, and other community partners, served 97,170 people. The food bank conducted client interviews in the tri-county area and discovered only 12% of the clients suffer from addiction. This is compared to 86% of the participants who reported having a chronic disease. This regional study identified the root causes of poverty and hunger to be chronic disease/health conditions, lack of transportation, lack of available and affordable housing, and discrimination.⁷ The findings of my research project support these root causes. My research also discovered that loss of income/work and generational poverty are root causes.

Causes of Poverty

Two of the axial codes described in chapter 5 are *stereotypes of poverty* and *causes of poverty*. Theoretical coding gives form to the axial codes and moves the story in theoretical direction. The relationship between stereotypes and causes is complex and we need to dwell in both categories. When we are able to recognize stereotypes, we are able to recognize causes, and vice versa. Causes of poverty include chronic disease/health conditions, lack of transportation, housing, discrimination, loss of income/work, single parenting, and generational poverty.

⁷ Sobolik, "Ending Hunger 2.0."

Chronic Disease/Health Conditions

Chronic disease and health conditions are a leading causes of poverty. Last year, a regional food bank conducted client interviews. Of those interviews, 86% reported having a chronic disease. Participants reported having high blood pressure (33%), depression or some mental health issue (31%), diabetes (29%), asthma (18%), and obesity (14%).⁸ In the interviews I conducted for this research, one of the most consistent causes of poverty was chronic disease and health conditions. The participants said;

- Before the cancer, I was supporting my family wonderfully.
- I just came from the clinic and they said I have melanoma, and I'm having surgery in the morning.
- Some of these choices that you're making are really truly life and death.
- My child was a sick baby and then in the hospital for two years.
- Mom, it's cancer.
- I got diagnosed on January 7th and I was going to have major surgery the next day.
- It was a much bigger surgery than they anticipated and they took everything down to the bone, all the nerves, tissue, everything. So I couldn't walk.
- My health just went as soon as we got here. So I wasn't able to go through with what I wanted to go through with.
- Since 2000 this, this was my 26th surgery.
- I have a, you know, fibromyalgia, I have dementia, I have a Parkinson's in neuropathy. I take probably 17 different pills a day for that.
- I always feel sick, confused, and hurt.

⁸ Sobolik.

- We were to where we could live again, not anything extra, but to where everything was paid and nobody was bothering us. And then I started getting sick.
- I'm so tired, you know, like right now I'm just wore out.
- We were set up all right. Boom. Triple bypass, heart surgery.
- I'm challenged every time I take a breath.
- I try to hold back tears all the time because of my pain.

Lack of Transportation

Another contributor to poverty is a lack of transportation. While much of the town is within walking distance, many of the employment opportunities, addiction recovery and treatment facilities, support groups, job training, education opportunities and resources require travel. Participants of the interviews named this challenge by saying;

- In November of 2008, I got laid off and I lost all of my health benefits and I totaled my car.
- We didn't have a washer and dryer in our house. So every two weeks we would drive to [50 miles] and I would do laundry. And that's when I would buy groceries because I never wanted anyone in Hill Town to see that I was using the food stamps to buy the groceries. So yeah, so that was always very awkward.
- I don't plow my driveway 'cause I don't have a car. Yeah. But I know my neighbors need to get to work.
- I have coworkers like Nancy, she picks me up, we truck together. She picks me up, brings me home and a lot of people help me with that.

Housing

Although housing costs are generally lower in small-town rural communities, higher poverty rates and lower incomes create serious challenges concerning affordable

housing. Housing for low-income families in rural areas tends to be too expensive, poor quality, unavailable, or inaccessible.

According to the National Rural Housing Coalition,⁹ rural low-income families are often limited to poor quality housing. Homes that *are* available are often in need of extensive repair or improvements to just meet basic health and safety levels. Rural homes are more likely to be in substandard conditions. In fact, nearly six percent of rural homes are either moderately or severely substandard, without hot water, or with leaking roofs, rodent problems, or inadequate heating or plumbing systems.¹⁰ While it is generally recommended that families should not spend more than 30% of their income on housing, the Housing Assistance Council reports that nearly half of rural renters are paying more than 50% of their income on housing.¹¹ While Hill Town has low income housing options, these options are limited and generally unavailable. Participants of the interviews named this challenge;

- Because you live there, you're stereotyped because it's low income housing. What people don't understand is the rent is high if you're paying full rent.
- I like the trailer park. A lot of people have a stereotype about that too, but they don't understand that it actually costs to live in the trailer court.
- It's like we're back over here in the outskirts of town.
- Utilities are not cheap. Sometimes your utility bill's over \$300. So how is that so low income? I'm telling you it's not low income, it's expensive to live there.

⁹ National Rural Housing Coalition is a national organization that advocates for improved housing and community facilities in America's small-town and farming communities.

¹⁰ "Barriers to Affordable Rural Housing."

¹¹ "Barriers to Affordable Rural Housing."

- I would like people that quit saying it is so low income, they should try to live there once.
- I have low income housing, that's what it's called.
- It would help if they made a through street. So we're not like just pushed off in the outskirts of town.
- It's like we're at like a dead end and like we're like cut off from the world. That is how I feel, like we're just cut off in the world.
- I wish they would just not forget about us because we're always last . . . trailer park and low income housing. I'm always last to get plowed because it's like we don't matter.
- There was low income housing available. And so I thought that would be a good thing. I accepted a home over the phone so I didn't go and look at the house that was being offered to us. I got to the house and there were no cupboards, there were no drawers in the kitchen. The ceiling in the bathroom was totally open and all the insulation was on the floor. And the basement had black mold. So I couldn't bring the kids there because [my child] had severe asthma.
- The housing authority said that they would get it taken care of within four weeks. And they didn't.
- Low income, I still, my rent was \$500 a month to live there. So even though it was considered low income, I was paying more rent to live down there than a normal renting rental place.
- I was the first woman in the first person under 60 to be on the housing board. And the first thing that happened, my first meeting was a man stood up and said that those people living down there, they hang out at the bars all the time. They're getting knocked up and they don't work. And I stood up being shy, quiet, and I said, excuse me, I said, I work full time. I've never been to the bar.
- In the beginning it was hard because, and I didn't know moving there, I didn't understand what low income housing meant.
- I never said we lived in low income housing. I would always say we lived back behind Stop and Go and people would say, oh, you live over there.
- So then I knew that my boys were getting the reputation of living in low income and, and I hated that.

- It would almost catch people off guard when I said I lived in low income.
- There was a look. Yeah. I hated that look. Yeah. I never wanted the boys to know that look.
- I would hear them talk about the kids that live in low income housing.
- I became defensive of low income people because I was living with low income people and working with the people who were condemning the people.

Discrimination

Concerning rural poverty, discrimination raises its ugly head in a variety of ways including racism, sexism, classism, ageism, and small-town mentality of insider/outsider distinction. Lisa Pruitt, a University of California at Davis law professor and publisher of the Legal Ruralism blog, writes, “We tend to associate rural poverty with whiteness When we think about rural poverty, most associations with rural poverty are with white populations and in fact, that is true to some extent but it’s actually far from being monochromatic.”¹² The reality is that rural poverty, like urban poverty, is disproportionately evident among African Americans and American Indians. In 2017, the nation’s child poverty rate dropped four percentage points to 18%, while the poverty rate for African American and American Indians kids remains substantially higher at 33%.¹³ Racism is certainly not the only bias contributing to small-town rural poverty. The participants of the interviews identified discrimination stating:

- People have some baseline prejudices.

¹² Lisa R. Pruitt, “Legal Ruralism: ‘Why the Left Isn’t Talking about Rural American Poverty,’” *Legal Ruralism* (blog), October 27, 2015, <http://legalruralism.blogspot.com/2015/10/why-left-isnt-talking-about-rural.html>.

¹³ “Ensuring the Future of At-Risk Youth,” The Annie E. Casey Foundation, <https://www.aecf.org/> (accessed December 10, 2019).

- It's an ugly, ugly, mean and, and very prejudicial viewpoint of who we think our poverty or impoverished people are.
- People always look down on them.
- It's the whole shame factor where they have to go in and ask permission to get help. I don't agree with that.
- We're always last to get plowed . . . They just forget about us.
- This comes from a male dominated viewpoint.
- There's a look. It's really subliminal, but it's there.
- If it was a family that had been from Hill Town. . . was totally awesome, they were great. But if it was a family who was not known or who had been in the cycle of poverty or had moved to the community, then they had to prove themselves and they got the bad rap and they didn't get respect.
- If you beat the person down and you're telling them that they're not good enough. . . then you start to believe that you are never going to be good enough.
- Until you've walked a mile in their shoes, you can't judge them.
- It was shaming. It was so much shame.
- I didn't understand that. You don't have to feel shame because you don't have money.

Loss of Income/Work

Chronic disease, health conditions, lack of transportation, lack of affordable and available housing, single parenting, and child-care are all causes of poverty. All of these conditions are also contributing factors in loss of income and work. The state unemployment number peaked in 2009 at 15,724. As of October 2019, the state unemployment number has dropped to under 10,000. While the state's unemployment

rate is among the lowest in the United States, securing employment continues to be challenging for low income people. This is what the participants of the interview said;

- I'm falling further and further behind financially. And, what you don't realize is it just takes one, one thing and everything goes wrong.
- I get a phone call saying that they're doing cuts and I lost my job.
- Well then in November of 2008, I got laid off and I lost all of my health benefits and I totaled my car.
- I wanna work, but I just can't, you know, it hurts so bad.
- It's just been really tough. And then, you know, we slowly made it, the wife started cleaning houses and stuff. So we, you know, got, you know, up there to where we were, you know, being to where we could live again, not anything extra, but to where everything was paid and nobody was bothering us. And then I started getting sick.
- We were trying to live off of \$1,100 a month. That's pretty much vehicle, you know, go live in your vehicle. And we did that for about three months out in the parking lot at Walmart and, Lowes hardware.
- You're always a half a heartbeat away from dire straits of poverty, which could include homelessness easily.
- I got sick and didn't have insurance, medical insurance and ended up in the hospital and it turned out, life threatening.
- I had no family down there with me, so it was just [my child] and me. So it was really terrifying to all of a sudden realize there's this life and death situation. But then also the reality financially after that was, wow, I didn't work for weeks.
- I was already just living on the edge financially. And so it destroyed me financially. And so I struggled with that for a long time.

Single Parents

The criteria of the four in-depth interviews conducted for this research included having at least one child in the household. Of the four in-depth interviews conducted, three were single moms. The fourth was a grandfather in which his wife and he were

raising their granddaughter who was a daughter of a single mom. This is what they had to say about the financial challenges of raising a child:

- In low income families, there's a lot of single parents.
- A lot of parents can't afford to go to work because they have little kids at home and it's kind of defeating the purpose. They go to just pay childcare.
- I followed the usual pathway of getting married at 18 years old. Not to say that I didn't love him or he didn't love me, but, you know, when you're 17, 18 years old, do you really know who you are?
- We were married about four years and it, it just was never going to last and it didn't.
- I did go to school, but I didn't understand how to be a single mom.
- I couldn't afford babysitters.
- I just couldn't, I couldn't relinquish parental rights. That just was not in my DNA. So it was just terrifying.
- To ask for help would have so humiliating and difficult. That would have taken every ounce of strength she would have had. She would have done it for her kids but for herself.
- And so now they have to go get a second job. Where do the kids go? Where does the childcare come from?
- Our divorce wasn't something I ever planned in my life.
- I was that low income mom, divorced with the two boys living, you know where.

Generational Poverty

In the interviews I conducted for this research, the most consistent cause of poverty reported by all of the participants was generational poverty also known as cycle of poverty. In economics, the cycle of poverty is the set of factors or events by which poverty, once started, is likely to continue unless there is outside intervention. Without

intervention, this cycle typically continues generation to generation. All four participants of the interviews had this in common. This is what they said:

- I love my grandma and my grandpa, but I was also resentful to the life I had. You know, looking around at everybody else.
- My whole life I was low and, and judgmental too. Feeling judged and judgmental. I was ashamed of who I was because I was low income my whole life or poor.
- My grandparents were working class and they would never go on the system. They were ashamed of it too. Even if they needed it, they wouldn't have because of those stereotypes.
- My mom worked two jobs when I was growing up. I had to babysit my sisters when I was very young so she could work.
- My parents were kind of transient. It was very much a transient family. I think part of it was a different era, where families had to go where the work was.
- My parents never had any money and worked hard.
- And that's how we were always raised. None of us had, as dad would say, a pot to piss in.
- I kept struggling alone. My mom and my dad would try to help as much as they could, but they had problems.
- My Dad was having health issues and mom was the sole breadwinner and you know, so they were really struggling at that time.
- Family resources were really. . . they did everything they could, but the bottom line was it wasn't enough.
- My biological family couldn't handle it and my dad wouldn't come around and my mom left.
- I had seen my grandparents have struggle sometimes where I'm like, grandma, why don't you go apply to get some assistance? Nope.
- After my dad left, my mom was sick with her congestive heart failure stuff and I was gone a lot.

The relationship between stereotypes of poverty and causes of poverty are a complex dance that helps us better understand the challenges of poverty. As this dance continues between causes, challenges, and stereotypes, we are able to see possible help and solutions. This is not a step by step process. Once we have reached possible help and solutions we enter back into the dance of causes, challenges, and stereotypes and the dance continues.

Normative task, ‘What must we do?’

The normative task asks, ‘What must we do?’ I got at this through theoretical, theological, and biblical study. I also have drawn from the four willing participants who had experienced or were experiencing poverty and gave them voice in what is and is not helpful.

Biblical Lenses

One of the biblical lenses of this project is from Matthew 25:35-36 “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” It is clearly established we have people who struggle with poverty, hunger, and/or homelessness in our community. We are called to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, tend the sick, and visit the imprisoned. What must we do? We must feed a hungry world. We must feed the kids in our neighborhood.

The second biblical lens of this project is from Romans 3:21-23 in which we are called to love and serve without distinction, for there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. In Matthew 25, Jesus teaches us to feed the

hungry saying, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' Who are the *least* of these? According to Paul in his letter to the Romans, we have *all* fallen short of the glory of God and we are *all* the least of these. No distinction is made. Galatians 3:26-29 teaches that in Christ Jesus we are *all* children of God through faith. Yet, when it comes to our attitudes concerning poverty we often make a distinction between 'us' and 'them'. All four of the in-depth interview participants described feeling a distinction, discrimination, and/or exclusion. When terms like *those* people or *these* people are used to describe people in poverty, a distinction is made that marginalizes people living in poverty and creates a subject-object dichotomy. Subject-object theory is the idea that different groups in society are given different levels of agency because of cultural norms. We must create a subject-subject relationship where we do not make distinction between *us* and *them*, but rather, it is simply *us* together.

What must we do? Be in relationship. Feeding the hungry is not simply about providing a meal. It is about building a relationship. We must overcome a perspective that *we* have something to give *you*. Instead, it is about *us* being in relationship and walking together without distinction. In Christ Jesus we are *all* children of God through faith. For we have been clothed with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of us are one in Christ Jesus.

The third biblical lens is from John 6:32-35. Jesus says, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." This research project was not simply about providing a meal or shelter. This

project was Christian outreach. We have people who are hungry in our community. The first task is to feed them. In doing so, we share more than a meal. We are sharing life. Sharing the bread of life is not about giving a man a fish or even teaching them to fish. It is about learning to fish together. This is how we live into a subject-subject relationship. In Christ, we receive much more than a meal. In Christ, we receive hope, peace, compassion, grace, mercy, forgiveness, love, comfort, strength, life, and salvation.

What must we do? We must break bread and share in a meal of the bread of life. We must gather at the Lord's table where all are welcome and all are celebrated.

The fourth biblical lens is from Luke 24:30-32, the Road to Emmaus. The Road to Emmaus is perhaps the most dominant image of this project. This Emmaus story takes place after the resurrection and before the ascension. The disciples walked with their faces downcast. Jesus himself came up and walked with them, but they did not recognize him. When they reached the village Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him. It was in the breaking of the bread that Christ was revealed.

The aim of the research project is not simply to provide a meal, it is about the in-breaking of God into our lives. It is about recognizing Jesus being revealed by the Holy Spirit. How is Jesus revealed? In the breaking of the bread, the gathering of people, the sharing of the meal. Like the Road to Emmaus, we do not always recognize the Holy Spirit being at work, but God is with us on the road.

What must we do? We must walk together. Even when we struggle. Even when we are hungry. Even when we are homeless. Even when our faces are downcast, God is present.

Theological Lenses

The first theological lens named in chapter 3 is missional accompaniment.

Missional accompaniment is “*walking together in a solidarity that practices interdependence and mutuality.*”¹⁴ The principles of accompaniment include: mutuality, inclusivity, vulnerability, empowerment, and sustainability. Missional accompaniment starts with faithfulness. It starts with prayer and discernment. It is about being a disciple, student, and apprentice. It is about walking together with our neighbor. It is about listening and learning. It is about following. It is about “being” rather than “doing.” To live a missional accompaniment ecclesiology is to walk in solidarity and interdependence with all people regardless of race, gender, class, age, etc.

What must we do? We must walk together. We must remain faithful. We must pray. We must discern. We must be disciples, students, and apprentices. We must walk together with our neighbor. We must listen and learn. We must follow. We must *be* rather than *do*. We must encourage each other. We must participate in mission *with* our neighbors and not *to* our neighbors. We must build relationships. We must recognize the vulnerability of the neighbor and be vulnerable with the neighbor. We must equip the saints and embed mission in ongoing relationships and community. We must live into a subject-subject relationship.

The second theological lens is *Free to Be*. As Lutherans we believe we are saved by grace though faith as a gift from God. This theology acknowledges that our works do not justify, but rather it is God who justifies by grace. Although our works do not justify, we are, however called to live an externally honorable life. Luther argues that Christians

¹⁴ ELCA, “Global Mission.”

are free from trying to justify themselves through works, and we are free to love and serve our neighbor. Luther coined the term *Theology of the Cross* to describe this theology of how God saves. According to Gerhard Forde, “Becoming a theologian of the cross involves turning to face the problems, joys, and sorrows of everyday life.”¹⁵

What must we do? We must turn and face the problems, joys, and sorrows of everyday life in our community. We must see *poverty* and call it what it actually is. We must see *suffering* and call it what it actually is. We must see *the cross* and call it what it actually is. We must see what God has done and continues to do in and through the congregation and community. As theologians of the cross, we are vessels of grace. We are called to serve our neighbor and face the problems, joys, and sorrows of everyday life. We are free from trying to justify ourselves, and free to be, free to participate in the mission of God.

The third theological lens is justice. “I believe that in many parts of this country, and certainly in many parts of this globe, the opposite of poverty is not wealth. I think, in too many places, the opposite of poverty is justice.”¹⁶ In chapter 3 a distinction is made between human justice and God’s justice. Where human justice fails, God’s justice prevails. Human justice seeks blind justice. God’s justice seeks vision with eyes wide open. Perhaps God wants to use the eyes of the believers to see and address what others are blind to perceiving. Right now in our world and even in our community, we are faced with injustice. In Hill Town we have people who are hungry, we have discrimination, and we have people struggling with abuse and addiction. We have kids in our youth group

¹⁵ Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, 9–10.

¹⁶ Stevenson, “Bryan Stevenson on Why the Opposite of Poverty Isn’t Wealth, but Justice.”

and in our community who do not have enough to eat, who do not have adequate clothing or shelter. In Hill Town we also have people of faith. We have people who care. We have people who want to help.

What must we do? We must stand up to injustice. We must speak the truth. We must seek justice with eyes wide open. We must see the needs of our neighbors. We must see the Holy Spirit and work and participate in it.

The fourth theological lens is identity. Who are we as a church? What is God's preferred and promised future for this congregation and community? What is God up to here? Community Lutheran Church in Hill Town is a congregation rooted in rich Trinitarian tradition and theology. While the congregation has a clear sense of who we are, we did not have language that articulated that identity. Community Lutheran church engaged in a two-year process discerning congregational identity and adopted a mission statement to exemplify identity. The mission statement of Community Lutheran Church is: *Helping people experience the love of God*. We recognize this is not our mission, but God's mission, and we participate in God's mission.

What must we do? We must live into this identity. We must continually discern and wrestle with theological identity and purpose. We must find our identity in the activity of the Holy Spirit. We must help people experience the love of God.

Pragmatic task, 'How do we get there?'

In the normative task we established what we must do. We must feed a hungry world. We must feed the kids in our neighborhood. We must overcome a perspective that *we* have something to give *you*. We must break bread and share in a meal of the bread of life. We must gather at the Lord's table where all are welcome and all are celebrated. We

must walk together. We must remain faithful. We must pray. We must discern. We must be disciples, students, and apprentices. We must walk together with our neighbor. We must listen and learn. We must follow. We must *be* rather than *do*. We must encourage each other. We must participate in mission *with* our neighbors and not *to* our neighbors. We must build relationships. We must recognize the vulnerability of the neighbor and to be vulnerable with the neighbor. We must equip the saints and embed mission in ongoing relationships and community. We must live into a subject-subject relationship. We must turn and face the problems, joys, and sorrows of everyday life in our community. We must see *poverty* and call it what it actually is. We must see *suffering* and call it what it actually is. We must see *the cross* and call it what it actually is. We must see what God has done and continues to do in and through the congregation and community. We must stand up to injustice. We must speak the truth. We must seek justice with eyes wide open. We must see the needs of our neighbors. We must see the Holy Spirit and work and participate in it. We must live into this identity. We must continually discern and wrestle with theological identity and purpose. We must find our identity in the activity of the Holy Spirit. We must help people experience the love of God. Now, how do we get there?

The pragmatic task asks, ‘How do we get there?’ The first thing we need to do in the pragmatic task is to identify how God is already at work in the community and discern how we can participate in it. The descriptive-empirical task already described what is going on with poverty in the community by asking ‘What is going on?’ Now, with the pragmatic task, we are going to dig deeper and ask, ‘What is God up to?’ One of the findings of this research is that God is present and God is active. When participants of

the end line survey were asked to name three things God is already doing in and through this congregation and community people identified God present and active in weekend meals for children, meals on Wednesday night, the Food Pantry, helping us to become more aware, collecting for food pantry, loving, assisting with school lunch funds, fellowship, financial help for worldwide hunger relief, worship, food pantry, meals at church, pastor studying rural hunger, new awareness, food shelf drive, volunteers at food pantry, leading us, and in the work of Community Lutheran Church volunteers.

As Lutherans we believe the Triune God is active and present in word and sacrament. We believe the Triune God is active and present in the gathering of people and the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the meal. God has promised when two or three are gathered in God's name, God is present. We believe God is present in the gathering of congregation, neighbors, and community.

How do we get there? We get there by listening and learning. We get there by raising awareness, having an attitude of prayer, and taking action. We get there by opening our minds and our hearts. We get there by actually feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, tending the sick, and visiting the imprisoned. We get there by developing new eyes for the neighborhood, teaching radical neighborliness, listening to neighborhood stories, discerning what God is up to in the neighborhood, and getting involved.¹⁷ We get there by partnering with the regional food bank, local food pantry, elementary school backpack program, Community Cares Emergency Fund, local churches, friendship free exchange box, caring individuals, veterans services, county public health, social services, local businesses, local law

¹⁷ Roxburgh, *Missional*.

enforcement, local schools, care center hospital and assisted living, regional shelters, senior citizens center, meals on wheels, Foods Resource Bank, emergency food distribution, feeding 5,000 meals on Wednesdays, WELCA sponsored groups, pastor's discretionary fund, Operation Christmas Child, world-wide quilt distribution, youth mission trips, youth service projects, parish nursing, and the health ministry team. We get there by being willing to be vulnerable, to trust, and to ask for help.

We get there by being biblically shaped and theologically informed. We get there by living into a missional ecclesiology that is not about who *we* are, but rather is about who *God* is. God is missional. God is present. God is gracious. Consequently, we get there with a church that is missional, a church that is present, and a church that is gracious.

We get there by seeing *Invisible Poverty* that is, of course, not invisible at all. We get there by looking deeper because what has been overlooked is our most vulnerable population. We get there by looking deeper into our own understanding of poverty, looking past the stereotypes and seeing people for who they really are, children of God. We get there by looking deeper into faith. We get there by asking, What is God up to here? What is God's preferred and promised future?

How might Action Research interventions affect awareness, attitudes, and actions of the congregation concerning the issues of poverty? The intent of Action Research is for change and transformation to happen. Hearing people's stories, sermons, Bible studies, newsletter articles, and services projects matter. Change and transformation have happened, yet the most important phase of this research project is still to come. What is God's preferred and promised future for this congregation, community, and world?

There are several questions that grew out of this research project for future study. I named racism as a cause of poverty, but the amount of attention given to it in this project is not nearly sufficient. Most people associate rural poverty with whiteness. There is much work to be done to identify and dismantle racism as it relates to rural poverty. Another area of study would be concerning elderly living in rural poverty. In this context we see elderly struggling to stay in their homes. It is not unusual to see elderly people go through a process of moving to an apartment, moving into assisted living, and then moving into long term care or nursing home. Finances play a vital role in where and when they make these moves and the level of care received. Another area for future study includes the role of addiction and its relationship with poverty. While I name the danger in stereotyping people living in poverty as being addicts, it would be valuable research to study the relationship between people who struggle with an addiction and the likelihood of poverty. Another area for future study is the correlation between children living in poverty and academic achievement. The final area of study that grew out of this research was the relationship between gender and poverty. This includes male compared to female, but also it includes gender identification, gender fluidity, and LGBTQ+ in a rural context.

The issue of poverty among youth was brought to my attention when I asked a high school student who had not been to church for a few months how she was doing and she responded, "It's been a long winter." When I asked her why she said, "Dad hasn't been working and we don't have enough food in the house." The hope of this project is we never have another child say, "We don't have enough food."

EPILOGUE

The issue of poverty among youth was brought to my attention when I asked a high school student who had not been to church for a few months how she was doing and she responded, “It’s been a long winter.” When I asked her why she said, “Dad hasn’t been working and we don’t have enough food in the house.” This came as a surprise to me. This child did not look like she was living in poverty. She did not look hungry. We live in a community of abundance. How could someone be hungry here? Now, when I look back on that conversation, I should not have been surprised. This project has forced me to face the issues of rural poverty and my own biases. I have learned that poverty does not have to look a certain way.

I entered the Doctor of Ministry program with an emphasis in Congregational Mission and Leadership to become a better pastor. This program has helped me to think and reflect theologically on the nature and purpose of ministry, to acquire useful knowledge and skills for ministry, to enhanced leadership in my local ministry contexts, to demonstrate spiritual growth and maturity, and to demonstrate enhanced leadership formation and professional development.

Through this study I have grown as a missional leader by becoming a better listener. Through biblical lenses, theological lenses, and Dwelling in the Word I have listened closer to who God has called me to be. I have become an intentional listener of God and an intentional listener of other people. Perhaps the most powerful lessons of this study was listening to the stories of those who had experienced poverty, especially the

four in-depth interviews. I had known all four of these people for several years, but when I took the time to fully listen to their stories, I learned things about their lives that I had overlooked.

Through this study I have also become a better speaker. I have learned to ask better questions. Instead of asking, ‘what are *we* doing here?’ a missional question asks, ‘what is *God* up to here?’ Instead of asking, ‘will we have enough?’ a missional question asks, ‘what do people need?’ Instead of asking, ‘how do we get them here?’ a missional question asks, ‘how can we serve them where they are?’ Instead of asking, ‘how do we get them back?’ a missional question asks, ‘how do we keep them engaged?’ Instead of ‘asking how can we afford that?’ a missional question asks, ‘how can we make a difference?’ Instead of asking, ‘what about me?’ a missional question asks, ‘what about the Holy Spirit?’ Instead of asking, ‘what do *we* need?’ a missional question asks, ‘what do *they* need?’ Instead of asking, ‘what have we done before?’ a missional question asks, ‘what is God doing right now?’ Instead of asking, ‘what is going on with them?’ a missional question asks, ‘what is God doing through us?’ Instead of asking, ‘where are we going?’ a missional question asks, ‘what is God’s promised and preferred future?’

Through this study my vision has improved. I am starting to see what has been overlooked. I am recognizing the realities of rural small-town poverty. Through biblical and theological lenses I am seeing the role of a missional leader and the role of the missional church to be aware, engaged, and active in the issues of rural poverty. I am seeing that accompaniment requires mutuality, inclusivity, vulnerability, and sustainability. I am looking deeper at my own understanding of poverty, looking past the

stereotypes and seeing people as neighbors. I am envisioning God's promised and preferred future. I am seeing *Invisible Poverty* that is, of course, not invisible at all.

APPENDIX A: BASELINE QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What is your age? (Years)

2. What are the last 4 digits of your social security number?

3. What is your gender?

- Female
- Male

4. How long have you lived in Hill Town community?

- Less than a year
- 1-4 years
- 5-10 years
- More than 10 years

5. Which race/ethnicity best describes you? (Please choose only one.)

- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian / Pacific Islander
- Black or African American
- Hispanic
- White / Caucasian
- Multiple ethnicity / Other (please specify)

6. When you think about someone in poverty, what are three words that come to mind?

1

2

3

7. We have an issue with poverty, hunger, and/or homelessness in Hill Town.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

8. How often do you see someone you would consider poor?

- Never
- Yearly
- Monthly
- Weekly
- Daily

9. What is your household level of income? (before taxes)

- I don't know
- 0-\$24,999
- 25,000-64,999
- 65,000+
- I would rather not say

10. How much are your total assets worth?

- My debt is higher than what my possessions are worth
- 0-\$64,999
- 65,000-149,000
- 150,000+
- I would rather not say

11. As Lutherans/Christians we are called to feed the hungry.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

12. Name three things God already is doing in and through this congregation and community to feed the hungry?

1

2

3

13. Name three possible things God is calling this congregation to do when it comes to issues of hunger and homelessness?

1

2

3

14. Who do you picture or imagine when you hear “homeless”? (list 2 characteristics)

1

2

15. Give two reasons you think people become poor?

1

2

16. What would you guess is the average age of homeless people?

17. Have you ever considered yourself poor or in poverty?

- Yes
- No

18. How many people do you know in Hill Town that struggle financially?

- 0
- 1-5
- 6-10
- 11-20
- More than 20

19. What percentage of the students at Hill Town Elementary School qualify for free or reduced lunch?

- Less than 5%
- Between 5-10%
- Between 11-20%
- Between 21-30%
- More than 30%

20. If there is an issue with poverty, hunger, and/or homelessness in Hill Town, are you willing to help?

- Yes
- No

APPENDIX B: END LINE QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What is your age? (Years)

2. What are the last 4 digits of your social security number?

3. What is your gender?

- Female
- Male

4. How long have you lived in Hill Town community?

- Less than a year
- 1-4 years
- 5-10 years
- More than 10 years

5. Which race/ethnicity best describes you? (Please choose only one.)

- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian / Pacific Islander
- Black or African American
- Hispanic
- White / Caucasian
- Multiple ethnicity / Other (please specify)

6. When you think about someone in poverty, what are three words that come to mind?

1

2

3

7. We have an issue with poverty, hunger, and/or homelessness in Hill Town.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

8. How often do you see someone you would consider poor?

- Never
- Yearly
- Monthly
- Weekly
- Daily

9. What is your household level of income? (before taxes)

- I don't know
- 0-\$24999
- 25000-64999
- 65000+
- I would rather not say

10. How much are your total assets worth?

- My debt is higher than what my possessions are worth
- 0-\$64999
- 65000-149000
- 150000+
- I would rather not say

11. As Lutherans/Christians we are called to feed the hungry.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

12. Name three things God already is doing in and through this congregation and community to feed the hungry?

1

2

3

13. Name three possible things God is calling this congregation to do when it comes to issues of hunger and homelessness?

1

2

3

14. Who do you picture or imagine when you hear “homeless”? (list 2 characteristics)

1

2

15. Give two reasons you think people become poor?

1

2

16. What would you guess is the average age of homeless people?

17. Have you ever considered yourself poor or in poverty?

- Yes
- No

18. How many people do you know in Hill Town that struggle financially?

- 0
- 1-5
- 6-10
- 11-20
- More than 20

19. What percentage of the students at Hill Town Elementary School qualify for free or reduced lunch?

- Less than 5%
- Between 5-10%
- Between 11-20%
- Between 21-30%
- More than 30%

20. Have you heard a sermon concerning poverty, hunger, and/or homelessness in the past 6 months?

- Yes
- No

21. Have you read a newsletter/newspaper article concerning poverty, hunger, and/or homelessness in the past 6 months?

- Yes
- No

22. Did you participate in a service project concerning poverty, hunger, and/or homelessness in the past 6 months? (This could include Great Plains Food Bank, the local food pantry, serving a community meal, Etc.)

- Yes
- No

23. Did you read or participate in a bible study concerning poverty, hunger, and/or homelessness in the past 6 months?

- Yes
- No

24. Did any of these events (sermon, newsletter/newspaper article, bible study, service project) change your awareness, attitude, and/or actions concerning poverty, hunger, and/or homelessness? _

- Yes
- No

25. If there is an issue with poverty, hunger, and/or homelessness in Hill Town, are you willing to help?

- Yes
- No

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORMS

Implied Consent Letter for Surveys

Child of God,

You are invited to participate in a study of Community Lutheran Church's general awareness, attitude, and actions concerning local poverty. The intent of this project is to raise awareness and to join God in the community by engaging practices to feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, and clothe the naked. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are valued and I would like to hear your voice.

If you decide to participate, please complete the survey on SurveyMonkey.com. Your participation of this survey is implied consent. The survey is designed to evaluate the current awareness, attitudes, and actions of this congregation concerning poverty. It will take about 10 minutes to complete. No benefits accrue to you for answering the survey, but your responses will be used to shape our congregational practices.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will not be disclosed.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relationships with Community Lutheran Church or Pastor Joe. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice.

If you have any questions, please ask. If you have additional questions later, contact Pastor Joe.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Pastor Joe Johnson

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Invisible Poverty

You are invited to be in a research study of the challenges of provided for children in Hill Town. You were selected as a possible participant because of prior conversations concerning the challenges. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Pastor Joe Johnson as a part of my Doctor of Ministry thesis project in Congregational Mission and Leadership at Luther Seminary. My advisors are Dr. Daniel R. Anderson and Dr. Alvin Luedke.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to better understand the challenges of money, food, expenses raising a child or children in a small-town. I hope the project better prepares me as a pastor (and us as a church) to do a better job walking with people, helping, and serving our neighbors.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to have a conversation in which you will have an opportunity to tell your story and communicate what has been and what has not been helpful.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

The study has several risks: First: I don't want to exploit our relationship or breach any trust we have established between us. Second: I recognize that talking about money and resources and be a vulnerable subject.

There are no direct benefits of participation in this research project.

Indirect benefits to yourself/or the general public of participation could be improved programs, policies, and procedures.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept confidential. All data will be kept in a locked file in a locked office at Community Lutheran Church; only my advisors, Dr. Daniel R. Anderson and Dr. Alvin Luedke, and I will have access to the data and, if applicable, any tape or video recording. If the research is terminated for any reason, all data and recordings will be destroyed. While I will make every effort to ensure confidentiality, anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

If tape recordings or videotapes are made, my advisors and I will be the only people with access, and they will be erased. Raw data will be destroyed by 5/31/2024. (Federal guidelines specify a minimum of 3 years for retention of data)

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Luther Seminary and/ or with other cooperating institutions including Community Lutheran Church. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Pastor Joe Johnson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Pastor Joe Johnson.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information or have had it read to me. I have received answers to questions asked. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature _____ Date _____

Signature of investigator _____ Date _____

I consent to be audiotaped (or videotaped):

Signature _____ Date _____

I consent to allow use of my direct quotations in the published thesis document.

Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The qualitative research included four interviews. I selected four willing participants by purposive/informed sampling who have experienced or are experiencing poverty with at least one youth or child in the household while living in Hill Town. It was not a requirement to be a member of the church. All interviewees selected had previously contacted me for help or had initiated conversation with me about living in poverty. I selected parents and/or guardians who are 18 years old and older. I chose to not interview youth because of the sensitivity of the subject matter and I did not want the youth to feel exploited in any way. I selected these participants based on prior conversations initiated by the subject. I used the recruiting statement, “We have already had conversation about the difficulty of finances and resources for parents or guardians supporting a child or children in this community. I am doing research and writing my doctorate thesis on this subject. Are you willing to have a conversation about your experience to help shape our congregation’s awareness, attitudes, and actions?” An informed consent form was used for the interviews (see appendix C)

The first interview was conducted at a coffee shop and it lasted one hour and eight minutes. The second interview was conducted at Community Lutheran Church and it lasted two hours and eleven minutes. The third interview was conducted at Community Lutheran Church and it lasted forty-six minutes. The fourth interview was conducted at Community Lutheran Church and it lasted fifty-one minutes. I gathered this qualitative data via audio recording. I transcribed the data.

Interview Questions:

- Tell me a little bit about your story. What brought you to Hill Town? Why did you stay?
- Tell a little bit about if you think people make a connection between your income level or poverty level, or financial situation and the quality of your character and the kind of person you are?
- Tell about low point?
- How do you think people have misunderstood you?
- How do you think people have misunderstood poverty?
- How do you think people have misunderstood hunger?
- What would be helpful?
- Who has been helpful?
- What groups or organizations have been helpful?
- What were the factors that led to poverty?
- Is there anything else that you'd like to add that we maybe didn't cover or that you'd like to clearly state or, or to be able to voice?

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW *IN VIVO* CODES

1. I think people need to hear what I have to say about low class families with working.
2. The stereotype for like low income families, people always look down on them, but that is the case. Like with housing or food stamps or welfare, like the TANF program.
3. It is crazy because they do want to work.
4. But when you go get a job, they never let you get ahead and it's like they never want to help you. It's like you get punished for actually working.
5. You get childcare assistance, but yet you never get ahead. You're still struggling even if you are working.
6. I live in housing but I have a job.
7. Full rent over there and that's like 500 and some dollars sometimes.
8. Because you live there, you're stereotyped because it's low income housing. What people don't understand is the rent is high if you're paying full rent.
9. I mean I could qualify for like what, \$30 a month working, what does that do?
10. People look down on people that get all that stuff, but they don't take into consideration that you'd think we never get ahead. L
11. But you gotta take into consideration how many, how much money it takes to feed all those kids. It's still not enough, you know, to feed those kids.
12. But this stereotype of low income families is bad because people look down on people like me for instance, but they don't understand.
13. We do try to work. We do try to, you don't fit in with the rest of society and the programs that are out there to help people.
14. The ones that actually do need it, Pastor Joe don't utilize it because they are ashamed of what people will think.
15. The ones that need it don't ever come because they're ashamed of how people see you. They don't go over there and stand in line and wait because they're scared of what people think.
16. My mom worked two jobs to support us and that still wasn't enough.
17. My mom did work and we still lived on welfare. You know what I mean? So that, that's even, and
18. My grandparents were working class and they, my grandparents would never go on the system. They were ashamed of it too. Even if they needed it, they wouldn't have. Because of those stereotypes,
19. There's people too proud to even ask for help.

20. My mom worked two jobs when I was growing up. I had to babysit my sisters when I was very young so she could work. Yeah. We stayed with my grandma a lot too.
21. They are nowhere near Lazy. I get disability so I didn't have a job for a while. People could say I was lazy, but I wasn't lazy. I was busy getting better with other issues. Now that I have a job, I'm not lazy, I go to work.
22. Childcare is expensive, you know, what are they supposed to do with their kids? Childcare is like outrageous. All your money goes to childcare.
23. In low income families, there's a lot of single parents.
24. And there's a lot of addiction issues in lower class but they hide it better.
25. People aren't lazy and lower class. You go to work just to pay childcare.
26. I was lucky I had my grandma, I had my mom, and I had family, family members to watch my daughter.
27. If I didn't have help from my family, I probably couldn't work when destiny was little.
28. All I know is a lot of parents can't afford to go to work because they have little kids at home and it's kind of defeating the purpose. They go to just pay childcare.
29. It's like people don't care in big cities. Yeah. Not like they do in smaller communities.
30. I was scared to like find a church, but I'm like, oh, this is a really good church. I think our church is the best in town.
31. What's great about our church is we reach out to the community even if they don't attend our church.
32. We don't say...you have to be a member.
33. It's you against them.
34. You know, it's funny that in any split second, we could be wherever, wherever that person is.
35. There's a lot of judgements for the homeless. But little do they know that they could be one step away from being right there.
36. I'm seven and a half months sober.
37. There is not as much to do in this town except bars. I want to know why there's more bars in small-towns than anything else. We have nothing else.
38. I like it here. It's my home. I'm just grateful I have people like Ed and joy and Rita to drive me to places like Fargo or I need to be for my appointments and stuff.
39. It's the whole shame factor where they have to go in and ask permission to get help. I don't agree with that.
40. It's already hard enough to show up at a place.
41. It's already hard enough to show up and wait in line.
42. People are like, oh, there, there's the low income housing, and it's kind of all out in a section. Like we're over here, you know? And there's always a lot of shame there too, and they're not even bad places to live.

43. It's like we're living in the ghetto, that's what I call it. But it's not even ghetto. They keep remodeling like new windows and new doors and, and they keep up the upkeep pretty good. But people always refer to it as the, there's a Low, you live over in the low-income place. No, I live over here.
44. Like I like the trailer park. A lot of people have a stereotype about that too, but they don't understand that how much it actually costs to live in the trailer court. You know, that's not ghetto there either, but it's like we're back over here in the outskirts of town.
45. Like they should not be referred to as low income housing because they're not really low income.
46. Utilities are not cheap. Sometimes your utility bills over \$300. So how is that, so low-income? I'm telling you it's not low income. It's expensive to live there.
47. I would like to people that quit saying it so low income, they should try to live there once.
48. Honestly, we have good neighbors there.
49. We watch out for each other.
50. If any of us ever needed anything, they're there.
51. I'd rather live out there than have and have somebody watching my place. . . that's good neighbors.
52. In the summer like we all get together, hang out, and watch their kids while they're all playing. You just keep an eye on.
53. I have low income housing, that's what it's called. It would help if they made a through street. So we're not like just pushed off in the outskirts of town. It's like we're at like a dead end and like we're like cut off from the world. And it's how I feel like we're just cut off in the world. So we're going to have these people over here because, they're not part of society.
54. We're always last to get plowed and we're like, they don't care. Like if we're so then we have like private people, like friends of friends come do it for us. They just forget about us.
55. I wish they would just not forget about us because we're always last . . . trailer park and low income housing. I'm always last to get plowed because it's like we don't matter.
56. A lot of people help me. . . I'm grateful for all that.
57. People care but they sweep it under the rug because they think somebody else is going to do it. It's a bystander effect when everybody thinks somebody else is going to do something about it.
58. A low point where it felt hopeless? Count my whole life pretty much. Honestly, my whole life until just the past couple of years honestly, which is pretty sad to say. I'm just being honest.
59. My whole life I've been low, ashamed and low and hateful.
60. I hate the hand, I was dealt.
61. I love my grandma and my Grandpa, but I was also resentful to the life I had. You know, looking around at everybody else.

62. It was never something outside the outside stuff, the shame probably, and the guilt and shame on the, I was running from my life, from my life of all of these people.
63. I would try to pretend to be something I wasn't or somebody I wasn't because of how people see me.
64. I'm at the point now where it doesn't really matter what people think of me.
65. They're going to judge me whether I care about it or not. So
66. My whole life I was low and, and judgmental too.
67. Feeling judged and judgmental. I was ashamed of who I was because I was low income my whole life or poor.
68. No matter what my mom did for me or my grandparents did for me, I always acted as if I was somebody else. I played a role, I guess. Which is sad because you shouldn't have to do that.
69. I tried to materialize my life. I would have materials but it doesn't make you happy, does it?
70. I'm so confused with everything.
71. My parents were kind of transient. It was very much a transient family. And you know, I think part of it was a different era, you know, where families had to go, where the work was. Yeah. And so that made for a more transient kind of lifestyle.
72. So, you know, in my, my parents never had any money and worked hard, but they were, you know, that good old North Dakota work ethic and just true blue people.
73. And that's how we were always raised. None of, none of us had really, as dad would say, a pot to piss in
74. We had lots of love and, and big family.
75. I followed the usual pathway of getting married at 18 years old and because it's safe for seem safe or seems easy or something. And not to say that I didn't love him or he didn't love me, but it's just, you know, when you're 17, 18 years old, do you really know who you are, kind of thing.
76. We were married about four years and it, it just was never going to last and it didn't.
77. I found myself at like 22 years old then as a single mom now and out in the world and try to figure out, okay, what am I going to do?
78. And now, now it's not just me. I gotta worry about it. Got to put food on the table. I've gotta feed this girl and I, and then, and then what I recognized while I was actually pregnant with Karly is that I had this enormous responsibility that was granted to me, that, you know,
79. God and the universe and, and whatever was conspiring came together to tell me that, you know, you gotta get your poop in a group here because you've got somebody else you've got to worry about, you know, and it's time to stop, just Kinda wallowing away. So, so then I, I, you know, I took a seriously, like, and I, at that time I would say in the last two years of marriage,

80. There was a lot of alcohol, there was never any kind of abuse, but it was, but a lot of alcohol and a lot of, you know, just being lost and, and I just couldn't remember.
81. I finally, I had to just reach out. And at that time, the only thing I could think to do is, was go to a counselor. I had to find a way to not be lost by the time that child was born. I didn't want her born into a world where my inability to see life was going to then affect her inability to see life. And so, anyway, that, that started me on a pathway and it really helped me to just kinda step back and look at life from a little different perspective.
82. So then the problem was, I still didn't understand how to make a living.
83. How do you begin to look in a world that means that yes, you can be passionately happy about your life, but make enough money to actually pay and, and that it's okay to make more money so that you can save some money.
84. You're always a half a heartbeat away from dire straits of poverty, which can be, which could include homelessness easily.
85. I find myself at 22 years old and I'm divorced and I've got this young daughter, we, we find herself down in Orlando, Florida of all places in the world. And you know, and at that time I kind of found this little career path in retail.
86. I had to figure out my way to advance myself so that I would not be an 80 year old woman who look back on her life with the regret that I never took the chance to create an opportunity in my life out of fear. I finally recognized that fear was keeping me from trying, even if it meant that I might fail. And when I finally realized in this epiphany is like, literally, it's one of those gobs gob smack moments when, when you just realized that the only failure in this life is, is the failure to try because failure in and of itself is simply a learning lesson.
87. So I did go to school I, but I, I didn't understand how to be a single mom. I didn't understand how to be a single poor mom because no matter what I did, I still always only made just enough money to squeak by. And really, honestly, it was never even enough to get by on. It was just barely enough. But I didn't understand, you know, how to leverage, you know, I didn't understand, you know, what the social welfare programs are for. I didn't understand that. There is no shame. You, you don't have to feel shame because you don't have money. And, and I think that that the, what you've got about invisible and poverty is, is, is really the core of the whole issue of poverty is that once you find yourself impoverished, once you find yourself and you don't even, it's not something that you articulate.
88. It's not something that you wake up one morning and say, Oh, I'm poor, and I'm going to school. I'm, I'm bettering myself. I'm working full time. And that's the only way I could see how to do it is I went to school at night and I, I worked during the day, I pulled in 40 hours a week and, and I worked like a dog for two years until I got that diploma.

89. I couldn't afford babysitters and, you know, but I had professors who were really gracious and understanding about those things, you know, so people, you know, what I began to understand through that process is that people were really gracious when, when I allowed myself to open up and let them know it was happening to me, they be, they wanted to do something. I had a boss at the time who would bring clothes for us and, and you know, and I'd go home and I'd cry because it was really humbling to have somebody provide those kind of basic essentials.
90. I had moments where I would open up my door and I would find a box of food would be sitting on the step. And then again, you know, you just, you're incredibly humbled because somebody took the time and the effort to see to it that you had some food. You know, and it's just a really small things. And then, and then of course, you know, while I was finding myself in this world and, and really I, it never, it never articulated in my mind that, you know, okay, I'm, I'm, I'm, I'm in a, I'm getting in a bad situation. [inaudible] And I'm getting worse, but I don't see it that way. I, I see where I'm making progress because I'm going to school, I'm doing something. But as I'm going, I'm falling further and further behind financially. And, and what you don't realize is it just takes one, one thing and everything goes wrong.
91. And when the, when, when the dominoes start to go down, you are going down. And for me it was like I got sick and didn't have insurance, medical insurance and ended up in the hospital and, you know, it was life turned out, life threatening. But, but they got it all covered right away. I had no family down there with me, so it was just Karly and I and, and you. So it was really terrifying to all of a sudden realize that, you know, there's this life and death situation, but then also then the reality financially after that was, wow, I didn't, I didn't work for weeks and, and so I was already just living on the edge financially. And so it destroyed me financially. And so I struggled with that for a long time. But again, I, I kept struggling alone and, and my mom and my dad would try to help as much as they could, but they had problems.
92. My Dad was, you know, having health issues and mom was the sole breadwinner and you know, so they were, they were really struggling at that time. And so family resources were really, they did everything they could, but the bottom line was it wasn't enough. So I struggled with it and they struggled. Karly came back home and she spent a couple of months up here with her dad. And, and that summer was probably like the, the doubts that I, I can recall in my life is, you know, I just, I felt like I could feel myself, I could feel myself disappearing and I could feel myself unraveling literally just I would lay awake at night and just feel like if I closed my eyes and if I fell asleep, I might not wake up again because I don't know if I want to wake up again because it's getting that bad.
93. And so you reach that depth of kind of depression and hysteria. And I mean, because it really was a hysteria too. I couldn't figure out what I

was going to do. I couldn't pay my bills, I couldn't pay my rent, and I couldn't keep up. And, and, and then you still have this North Dakota pride, you know, this North Dakota, I can do this. If I don't do this, then there's something wrong with me kind of thing. So I struggled for that entire summer and finally hit rock bottom. And then, you know, and I don't remember where, where I was when the moment hit me, but I just remember that the moment hit and I realized, well, I need to start over. And, and so I visited with my parents and filed bankruptcy and, and had to get everything re resolved so that I could start from scratch and start over. And

94. Boy, you know, when I, when I see people to this day who are in straights, my heart just, just pleads. I should've been born independently wealthy so I could just hand out, you know? Right.
95. That was the worst poverty I've ever experienced in my life. So being 2000 miles away from home, being entirely on my own and, and don't get me wrong, I never felt really sorry for myself because I always understood why I put myself there. I wanted to try to do something on my own and I wanted to try to learn how to live independently and get ahead, but looking back, I see where, how much I endangered our lives and you know, when I look back on it, it really, you know, kind of makes me nauseated and really kind of sick to my stomach.
96. But at the time that you're into it, you just don't see it that way. You don't see that some of these choices that you're making are really truly life and death.
97. I needed to make more money after, after the bankruptcy and after getting, you know, all of that resolved and, and having that hysteria wiped from me from, because at a certain point I thought we were going to be homeless. I mean, I really did. I thought I and I, I was terrified. I couldn't figure out where are we going to go and what happens to Karly. I just couldn't figure out what happens to Karly, what do I do with her?
98. I just couldn't and I couldn't relinquish parental rights that, that just was not in my DNA to be able to do that. So it was just terrifying.
99. I needed to make more money, but I couldn't afford a babysitter, so I had to find freelance work. Anything that will let me work at home and no prostitution.
100. No, no. That just give me some good, honest work that I could do at home. Right. And I say that in, in just now, but I mean, at that time, Joe,
101. I was so deep down. How do you make money as a young woman? Your mind just goes to anything that that might work. Yeah. And, but, but that was not in my DNA either.
102. I said, oh, cool. More money. Well, and so that's my God moment.
103. And, and that was the moment I realized, Oh, this is what I'm supposed to do. This is how art comes together with me. . . its people. I love people. I just loved it.
104. It was just like, let's just like literally, you know, smacked up alongside the head nurse. Oh, okay. I'm listening. I got it, I got it right. And it

- made the difference, you know, being able, but going into the depths and then learning those lessons and then being able to, to begin walking forward.
105. I always had a strong support system with my family. And I always knew I always knew that I had faith in, you know, in God and myself and Kate that as a family we could, we could do this if we could just keep one foot going in front of the other.
 106. Because you can be anything. So how are we going to get you there? Because that's what I never asked myself is, okay, so what's the dream? But then how do I get there?
 107. We got really good at figuring out how to do things free.
 108. So then the question is how, what are we going to do? What can we do? We can't, we can't do it all, but we can do something. So what can we do? And here we are, we have no money, but we can do something.
 109. He was in a truck accident and got hit by a truck. And so we always knew that he'd spent about six months in a, in a body cast. We always knew that the day would come, he wouldn't be able to work because one that arthritis started to set in it. It was going to be a game changer in his life.
 110. I've always thought when I was younger that poverty is the very first person that I remember seeing in Orlando, Florida, which was a bag lady going down orange blossom trail. And my heart just dropped when I saw this person with her entire life. In that grocery cart walking down the street. To me that was abject and that was destitution, that that was poverty.
 111. Then I, I of course I saw a lot of different levels in the experience, my own form of poverty. But coming back north here and into Hill Town, you don't see the poverty. And so then when I began to experience again was a different kind of poverty, which I think a lot of us experience, which is a working man's poverty, which is your back to your making enough but maybe not quite enough to get ahead and, and that's okay as long as one thing doesn't come a lot and as long as the one thing never comes along to start the domino effect.
 112. It's always been my fear that the one thing might come along and disrupt that again.
 113. We headed straight up to social services and you know, so we were on food stamps from snap for a while and I, the heating assistance and I think we probably had that kind of help for at least two years until we were finally able to.
 114. I wanted to be able to give back to my community.
 115. If we were to go out and start really looking at it, which is for right, wrong or indifferent, we have, and we have some baseline prejudices against social welfare programs. And part of that comes and I don't mean any offense by this cause I don't think that you're one of them, but comes from a male dominated viewpoint that all they need to do is pick themselves up by the bootstraps and go to work for \$7 and 25 cents.

116. I realized that there's this huge problem of lack of information and basic understanding of what is poverty. It isn't going to be the bag lady in Hill Town, North Dakota. It's going to be something else. But that doesn't mean it's no less devastating for that person or that family. It is truly devastating and they're suffering in silence.
117. I just didn't know what was available to me to reach out to.
118. Here, I think most people know what's available to them, but that you still have pride. You still have people who simply don't want the handout. They don't want the reputation. They don't. They don't.
119. Being poor is so onerous and so devastating to the morale and to their ability to see beyond where there are to see beyond where their position is right now.
120. And who do we know that can pay their rent? Put Food on the table? Don't forget you got to get medical insurance. Don't forget you got to pay for gas. You got to go to work. You got to pay for the babysitters, you, all of these details and their monumental details and that, that's what I, I always tried to get across to you. Those are, it's monumental when you're already buried.
121. The first prejudice is the belief by many that people who are on social welfare programs do so because they don't want to work or they don't want to work and then want to stay home and do drugs or get drunk or just don't want to work.
122. So then, then the question becomes, but if they are a drug addict, does that mean then that their life that as a human being is any less valued or that their children's lives are any less valued because they have an addiction problem?
123. The growing number of people who are on social welfare programs in North Dakota are 65 years old and older. So then so then what that tells you is that's not drugs. That's not alcohol, that is people who are reaching their bonafide retirement age and they still aren't making enough money. They need assistance
124. To ask for help would have so humiliating and difficult. Those would have taken every ounce of strength she would have had, but she would have done it for her kids if she had kids at home. But for herself, no.
125. It's an ugly, ugly, mean and, and very prejudicial viewpoint of who we think our poverty or impoverished people are in North Dakota.
126. And so now they have to go get a second job. Where do the kids go? Where does the childcare come from?
127. For a long time I had no idea how I was going to pull myself out of that. And so the steps came along and I, and I took the steps and the steps worked out .
128. Well, some of, I think some of the, the most obvious challenges are just the lack of resources.
129. We have a great food bank, we have great churches, we, we have great amenities. We have great hospitals, school you know, so, so those types of infrastructures are really strong here. I think the what, what I would

- say is one of the biggest problems is I don't know that everybody knows even how to find what's available.
130. You find ways to be able to try to create the help without making them ask for it.
 131. I do think we have a growing number of working poverty people in our area that are not the bag ladies, but they are just, just holding on and, and those people are just, they're just a hair's breath away from a disaster, you know?
 132. Something will go wrong. It's life. Yeah. Something's going to happen.
 133. But that comes back to some of our camouflage. That if you don't live up to a certain level of expectancy, then people were going to think less of you. I think we camouflage ourselves.
 134. I think that we are, we, so we can be on the brink of destitution or, or just simply struggling, but we still put on our, our good clothes. We still put our makeup on or comb our hair, most of us, you know, and, and we still go out there and we present ourselves that everything is great. Everything's fine. Everything's wonderful so that nobody would know. And we can, we can, we can remain invisible.
 135. I think anybody who is in a poverty situation, whether it's deep into it or on the cusp of it or you know, like, like okay, I'm going to live off of my credit cards for a couple of months and I'll just worry about it later, you know? We just, we don't want to tell people, we have to keep it a secret, it's the dirty little secret, has to be a secret because people will think less of me if they can see that, that I'm really not doing as well as they think I should be. And, and it's not healthy for us to do that.
 136. Nobody wants to hear the ugly side of things.
 137. You know, people in that small-town mentality, it feels like everybody's talking about it. And to an extent, they are.
 138. And if you tell one person you're not doing well, all of a sudden the talk of the town is not doing the other businesses going under.
 139. People start looking at you and they start turning away.
 140. Low cost food. They need it. It's, its like, and because they can't just go to Fargo, they can't just go to grand forks. Yeah. But they can't, and then want to support their local grocery store. Yeah. But they can't all the time. They, they just can't functionally feed their family that way.
 141. Yeah. So there's this whole holistic kind of approach to it. And I know I was talking to one of one of the new legislators who's a, she's a senator now and she's been up in arms a little bit because of these recent articles that have been coming out about nationally on, on dollar generals and how they're affecting eroding and camouflaging again, or exacerbating actually poverty. And the, the, the, the theory being that because they pay a have relatively low amount, like most retail does. Yeah. And because their business model is not fresh foods, you know, then you're encouraging the pop sales, you're encouraging the candy bar, you're encouraging the, the prefab foods and all this. And I told her, you know, all that might be true and I, and I wouldn't disagree. I, I wish with all my

- heart that I could sit down with each and every diet. That's another really big thing about people in poverty.
142. They don't understand how to eat well. They don't understand how to prepare foods well. And all of that is a huge money waste for them.
 143. It meant the difference between them buying groceries or not or not.
 144. We have a huge issue with helping people to eat healthfully and, and to be able to understand, yeah, what healthy food is.
 145. Like with their children and even themselves, if you, if you can eat a really good meal that is high in nutritional value in fiber instead of high in sugar and carbs than an hour later, you're hungry again and you're going to go eat more of the same foods. There's a, there's a vast difference in what that does for your physiological makeup, but then also your mind.
 146. So then how do you help people, how do you help to invite people into those conversations without, without demeaning them in the process?
 147. We have so many great resources in our area.
 148. One of the biggest tragedies of just rural Midwest and probably rural America is the inability to connect all the dots. We have, most of us have, great resources, but here in this county, we know we do.
 149. And we know each and every resources doing their absolute level best, but it's still not enough.
 150. As soon as it becomes political, even in a good political year, we lose people every time.
 151. We can't do everything, but we can do something.
 152. It starts with, with conversations and discussions.
 153. Just because you have an addict, being an addict is not a moral judgement. It is a human condition.
 154. When we first moved here, we were outsiders. Pure and simple, not trusted. Not particularly welcome. And there was a lot of loneliness.
 155. There was never really any extension of friendship or you know, anything really.
 156. And so they lived here for Gosh, I want to say about three, maybe four years, three, four years, probably four years. And then my dad was offered another job so they moved. I ended up leaving for, I don't know, seven, eight years, something like that before coming back. When I came back, it was so interesting because when I came back, all these people who really had by all purposes had never really extended themselves to all. Now suddenly were asking about my dad and they're asking about my mom and they're asking about the family, where you were, where's your parents been, what are they doing? By that time, of course my dad, has died. I remembered at the time thinking, you know, I wish you, I wish you all would expressed any interest, any interest at all in them while they lived here. It would have meant so much to them.
 157. It's the only hometown I've got because my parents were a transient family. Yep. This is the only hometown I've got. So they're stuck with me whether they like it or not, basically.

158. I still call myself an immigrant because I remember those initial years though, my mom and dad were, you know, really kind of ostracized and not, not particularly welcomed into the community.
159. And my mom remembered that and it was painful for her. And you know so what, so the difference between the two, the difference between the two I think is that, you know, back as somebody who was an outsider coming in, somebody who wasn't particularly born and bred here, I don't know that we felt that we had any opportunity to reach out for help from anywhere. The pastor at that time wasn't a particularly gracious kind of guy. You know, I thought that he wasn't caring, but I don't know that my mother would have ever felt comfortable sitting down and visiting with them. So she's, I think she just felt like she had nobody and really lonely.
160. We have a church or plural that are really welcoming, with great leaders who are very personable and, and inviting as an atmosphere, it's inviting. I think that our schools are leaders at the schools tend to be very inviting. I think that that's what I see and, and felt like from, so from now when I see young people or any people who are moving into the communities, I think I'm seeing them being able to come in easier.
161. Yeah. I think a lot of people when they come to a small-town, they probably have some preconceived ideas of their own. And so if they can, if they can stick it out long enough for the relationships to build, right. But, but relationship building is hard. It takes time. There is no fast, easy way to do that.
162. I'm here now. Where do I get started?
163. She didn't look the stereotype.
164. So you're, you're making yourself incredibly vulnerable. You're already vulnerable. Right. And then basically what you're doing is you're going to rip your soul open and you're going to walk through that door yeah. And Trust.
165. There's a look. It's really subliminal, but it's there.
166. The more stories that are told and shared so that other people know they're not alone and poverty is right in the middle of all of that.
167. If we can begin to like de-stigmatize it and if we can begin to take those damnable labels or ways so that, that's not the first thing people see and then maybe it helps and maybe more people get the help that they need. You have to get to help early enough, then they've got more resources and it's, it's that, how do you, how do you, how do you teach a person to fish?
168. So it, that's a long, long battle, but it's got to start somewhere.
169. There's some small things that we can do and make a big difference. One of the, one of them, he resources that we have available to us.
170. Maybe people need just some basic economics. Yeah. Household Economics.
171. Somebody's got to care.

172. Once you start removing yourself, it's just gets incrementally harder and harder.
173. They needed someone to fill in and I was going through my divorce. And so I asked if I could get a permanent spot in Hill Town.
174. And then also there was low income housing available. And so I thought that would be a good thing.
175. And I accepted a home over the phone so I didn't go and look at the house that was being offered to us
176. I got to the house and it was in the long term housing and there were no cupboards, there were no drawers in the kitchen. The ceiling in the bathroom was totally open and all the insulation was on the floor.
177. And the basement had black mold. Yeah. So I couldn't bring the kids there because why it had severe asthma.
178. The housing authority said that they would get it taken care of within four weeks. And they didn't.
179. So I being the mama bear who's normally very shy and very insecure, I took pictures of all of it and I sent it to our governor, our legislature, our the housing development and health and human services. And sent a letter and said, how can you put low income people, anybody, nobody deserves to live in this, not even if I'm low income.
180. Low income, I still, my rent was \$500 a month to live there. So even though it was considered low income, I was paying more rent to live down there than a normal renting rental place.
181. Everything got fixed and I got asked to be on the trail county housing board.
182. Sure. I was the first woman in the first person under 60 to be on the housing board. And the first thing that happened, my first meeting was a man stood up and said that those people living down there, they hang out at the bars all the time. They're getting knocked up and they don't work. And I stood up being shy, quiet, and I said, excuse me, I said, I work full time. I've never been to the bar in this town.
183. And I ended up single because of circumstances. I said, so no, and if you're going to be on this board, and I couldn't even believe I said these things because I was very insecure back then, but it's the mama bear that. Yeah. You know, and he said, why are you even on a board like this if you're not here to listen to the people. Yeah.
184. So, but so anyway, I came to Hill Town to work for head start and loved that. And then the boys came back to live with me in August that year. So they couldn't live with me until everything was taken care of.
185. The first thing that I loved about it (Hill Town) was the tee ball. I had never grown up around sports or anything, but everyone was so excited to get my kids into T-ball.
186. And now it's where I started to meet some of the other parents and the other families and started to feel community.
187. And then, you know, I wanted to see the church was the first place that that I felt like a part of something there.

188. In the beginning it was hard because, and I didn't know moving there, I didn't understand what low income housing meant.
189. Seriously. It all goes back to that there was a stigma when you would say, and I never said we lived in low income housing. I would always say we lived back behind stop and go and people would say, oh, you live over there.
190. So that was really hard because then my boys were also, I didn't realize that all the low income housing was in one area and focused in one spot.
191. So then I knew that my boys were getting the reputation of living in low income and, and I hated that. So I would never, I tried to like protect the boys from that cause I didn't want them to ever say they lived in low income. So we always lived in the yellow house behind stop and go, you know.
192. So that was one of the really hard things. And like when the kids would get invited to birthday parties or whatever and you would tell people where you lived, you could tell by their face and because, and you don't have to put this, but because I did, it plays up myself as low income.
193. I was a lead teacher for head start. I was involved in boy scouts and the little league in all of those things. Then it would almost catch people off guard when I said I lived in low income.
194. I mean, you notice and notice how there was a look. Yeah. And I hated that look. Yeah. And so I never wanted the boys, to know that look. And then so working for head start and the kids had to go to daycare when there wasn't school.
195. Well, my, so I was making \$7 and 16 cents an hour as a lead teacher and which comes out to about \$800 a month. My daycare bill was \$750.
196. And so then that's when we had to go on food stamps and that was really probably one of the hardest things for me.
197. I was so proud that I worked full time. And again, if you remember, I said my rent was still \$500 a month.
198. People knew you were on food stamps. So I would never, and
199. We didn't have a washer and dryer in our house. So every two weeks we would drive to Fargo and I would do laundry in Fargo. And then that's when I would buy groceries because I never wanted anyone in Hill Town to see that I was using the food stamps to buy the groceries. So yeah, so that was always very awkward.
200. And then being a worker for head start, I would, okay. So again, being on both sides of the table, I was a head start parent and I was a worker there.
201. So I would hear them talk about the kids that live in low income housing. And I would hear them talk about how, oh, they have this, but they're on welfare and Oh, they have that and they're on welfare.
202. Well, like for me, if the kids and I had something big, which I'm, and I, and you know me, I'm not real materialistic, but say the kids had an x box, first of all, I didn't buy it for them. Second about my dad was wealthy and the Christmas presents, he would get them, or the birthday

- presents, he would get them were big and typically he would get them a TV and a gaming system or something, you know?
203. And so it wasn't, so I would hear people while I was working and talk about those families. I did a home visit and did you see they had a big screen TV or they had an Xbox.
204. And then I became the person to say, Yep, I have a TV, I have an x box. I still don't have money.
205. You can't judge.
206. And that's where I became defensive of low income people because I was living with low income people and working with the people who were condemning the people that, and I never could understand why are you in a position
207. I'm not saying everybody that worked there was that way. But if you're in a position to help people, why is it them and us, you know, why aren't we "we", you know,
208. And if you're going into their houses, you are getting invited into their homes and they don't want to your home and judge you.
209. So why do you have the right to make those assumptions, you know, of how that happened.
210. I couldn't pay my whole utility bill and the Hill Town utilities used to, you run a lot harder than it is now. And so I would pay a portion, like I always made sure when I did my bills that everybody gets portion,
211. So really this wasn't an avoidance thing. I could see how she thought it was. But in the mornings before school, we would go and run here and sometimes, and you know, they have the little dropbox in the Hill Town utilities, so my two sons dropped it in and I didn't think anything of it. And I got a call from the lady who used to work there.
212. She left me this horrible message on my phone at home saying how, first of all, they are not a credit card company. You cannot just make payments. It needs to be in full.
213. Secondly, I need to quit hiding from them by having my children come in and pay the bill.
214. And it was just, it was just awful, awful message.
215. You haven't walked a mile in my shoes and not that I wanted sympathy, I didn't.
216. Why, why? My child was a sick baby and then home in the hospital for two years.
217. Our divorce wasn't something I ever planned in my life. Yeah.
218. And we were doing the very best we could with what we had.
219. And I was not trying to take advantage of the utilities or any other thing.
220. You haven't walked in my shoes anyway, I never heard back from it, but I never also got another nasty message about it.
221. And, and it continued. I mean, but I would never ever go back into the city of Hill Town's office. And I still to this day have not gotten back in there because

222. I was so, I was so proud, Joe, that I was paying my bills. Does that make sense?
223. I wasn't hanging around in the bars. I wasn't going out. My kids never had a babysitter until they were in third and fifth grade
224. They stayed with grandma and grandpa occasionally.
225. I was so proud that I paid my bills and when she said that it like knocked me to this low level cause that's like now they think that I'm trying to screw them. Yeah. And that was never the case. I was trying to be proactive. But yeah.
226. The first five years I lived in Hill Town, yes I was that low-income. It took five years.
227. I was that low income mom with the divorced, divorced with the two boys living, you know where.
228. If it was a family that had been from Hill Town for quite a while and they had a child in head start that was totally awesome, they were great.
229. But if it was a family who was not known or who had been in the cycle of poverty or had moved to the community, then they had to prove themselves and they got the bad rap and they didn't get respect.
230. We had been there for five years and I got so involved with what was going on with him because he was one of Shane's best friends,
231. That's the first time I remember people looking at me like I was part of the community and not this sponge. You know? And, and that's when I started to get more involved in the community, you know, but it was through a child and it was, if it was just, excuse me. Yeah. I'm going to grab and go grab a tissue I'm sorry.
232. Go to the clinic where a bunch of wonderful people now, but when, when we were new to the community, there was a different,
233. We were treated way different than once we became part of the community. Yeah, yeah, yeah.
234. I tried to keep it secret that we were low income.
235. Yeah. You know, I tried not to let people know the struggle and I think had I not done that, we might not have gotten accepted the way we finally did.
236. And Hill Town has amazing people.
237. It was November and the weather was wintery and things were tight. And they shut our power off. And I didn't want to tell anybody that they shut our power off cause I didn't know how I was going to turn it on anyway because it would've been over a hundred dollars to turn it on plus the bill and I didn't know how to go about it. And so I took an extension cord to my neighbor's house and we used electricity from her house but then we got in trouble and I got her in trouble
238. The boys, I'll talk about this because it's the first time they realized we didn't necessarily have money because we were eating ramen and Kool-Aid and crackers.
239. And so finally I called my dad and I was like, I have no clue what to do.

240. It's cold and, and I can't do this. And of course he helped me and my dad would have helped me with anything, but I didn't feel like it was his place to support the boys and I, it was mine.
241. And so, but during that time, I almost, I talked to Dennis and Sherry about taking the boys because I knew that I couldn't afford to provide them the life they needed. And so I asked them if they would take up and they're like, no, we're not taking your kids away from you and we're going to help you.
242. And but that was to consider giving my kids away was one of the hardest because my boys are my world, but yet they shouldn't have to go without power.
243. And I never not worked full time, ever, you know?
244. And so that's when I decided to go back to school. That December I actually enrolled back in school,
245. And so I talked with Dennis and Sherry, the kids, his grandparents, and they said they would keep the boys the nights that I had school and they would feed them and they would bathe them and they would do our laundry.
246. So I didn't have to go to Fargo anymore to do laundry, which was huge.
247. So it was like, okay, we're going to do this and we're going to, we're going to pull it together. And so I went back to school for two years.
248. And but I didn't qualify because I kept working full time. I didn't qualify for like childcare assistance or four back then, any of the other benefits because I was working full time, but I wasn't not going to work.
249. So but I did go, I made the Dean's list all the way through, which was yes.
250. And if Dennis and Sherri couldn't keep the kids, my professors let them come to class, which was really awesome. And that's when things really turned around and I knew I didn't have to give my boys away.
251. Yeah. And during that time, and I don't know if you know, and this isn't a pity party, but I didn't get child support for my kids until a year before Shane graduated from high school.
252. So I had not, their dad was not contributing at all to, to their support until I finally won. It was actually right after I went through the counselor the first time I finally won and got child support as the state evolved. So, so there was just never that coming in either, you know.
253. My child was really sick back then and he wasn't taking care of why its medical needs. So I had to take him back to court because like I got there and there were no sheets on the bed.
254. And then he just pretty much disappeared at that.
255. So I commuted for work, loved it, and when I would travel. So I was still living in Hill Town, still living commuting to those music. Yup, Yup. And when my, so I was running a head start program in Manville and the kids and I were doing great.
256. I bought a new car at Dodge stratus... And then one day I get a phone call saying that they're doing cuts and I lost my job,

257. So I traveled a lot for work, but they would let me take my boys when I traveled, if it was on a weekend. So the kids thought they were going on vacation all the time because we would stay in hotels and stuff, which was really cool. And the boys that I had so much fun that year.
258. Well then in November of 2008, I got laid off and I lost all of my health benefits and I totaled my car.
259. Shane had kept pushing me and pushing me about the mole that was on my leg and saying that I had cancer. And I kept saying, no I haven't.
260. It's been done well in December I decided to make an appointment for the first week in January, but I had no health insurance but I needed to get that checked.
261. And so my mom convinced me to apply for medical assistance because I had been out of work for a month and I applied for a medical assistance the last week in December. Thank God.
262. Because then I was diagnosed with my cancer the first week in January. Wow. Yeah.
263. And Shanel had been saying for like nine months that he knew it was cancer and I kept saying, no, they already biopsy Yada.
264. He's like, mom, its cancer.
265. I got diagnosed on January 7th and I was going to have major surgery the next day, but then the doctor doesn't want to do it because he wasn't sure how far the cancer had spread.
266. So I went to teach confirmation that night after I got diagnosed and I had never talked to this woman other than occasionally a wave at you know, ball games or whatever. And our kids were and she said, are you okay? And I said, nope. I just found out I have cancer and I'm having surgery in the morning. And she says, what? And she took me in the room behind the fellowship hall and she's like, what is going on?
267. I just came from the clinic and they said, I have melanoma and I'm having surgery in the morning.
268. What are you going to do with your kids? I said, because I don't know who's taking you. I don't know. I just said, okay, I'm taking you and we'll figure out who's going to take care of your kids.
269. So on January 19th of 2009 I have my surgery and it was a much bigger surgery than they anticipated and they took everything down to the bone, all the nerves, tissue, everything. So I couldn't walk. And little did we know I wouldn't be able to walk for four months really.
270. Everybody just became so good with my kids, like the kids. Shane was in basketball and he never missed a game. He never missed a practice. People made sure that the kids got to any school event and it was amazing.
271. And now it's the first time that I really not having been from small-town North Dakota or, anyway, that's where I really learned to help people jump in, and people would show up.

272. I was outside trying to, trying to shovel away sidewalk with my wound and my crutches. And again, it was rich deal all the sudden pulls up and he's like, are you doing? Well I need to shovel my sidewalk. And he's like, get back in your house and you know, shuffle with the sidewalk and the driveway
273. Then my son's class. They did a Cents for Hope and they did. Bills were the kids I had started. I had had almost all of them in preschool and then I was a Sunday school teacher to almost all of them. So it was like Ashley and Jace and Nick and all of that.
274. Joe, that's also no longer the divide of like finance. I was not, oh and I didn't live in low income housing at that time anymore. Yeah. I lived in the house behind the high school. Which was huge to me.
275. I was finally just me and my boys wear the boys and we had come into our own in the community, you know.
276. The stigma changed a lot and yeah, it was just was different.
277. And it was during that time too that I really learned my faith, or started to learn about my faith and my belief in God.
278. I had always been so scared of death.
279. I thought I would die young and my boys would be left without a mom. And sure enough, I got diagnosed with my cancer.
280. I always thought I would die because of to pay the price. And which is not the case, but it took that for me to learn God's grace and that what happened to Kathy had nothing to do with what was happening to me.
281. And I learned about family and Hill Town being my family because my family, my biological family couldn't handle it and my dad wouldn't come around and my mom left and I never saw my brother and sister at all when I went through them, the cancer the first time.
282. I couldn't get myself out of my bed to get up and all of a sudden there's this woman fix you're standing in my bedroom. She said, I brought barbecues.
283. And she was just there like an angel
284. And from then on her and others just really got us through and they did a benefit for us, which was so humbling. The Kiwanis did pancakes and I didn't understand, a benefit, you know, and they were so amazing.
285. However, the scary part was because I was on assistance, I almost lost that and all of my assistants because of that, because I got it.
286. I would have lost all of my benefits.
287. I think people think help is a onetime thing, like if I help you like and which is a generous thing, Joe, like if someone brings over, they know you're going through a tough time and they bring over a bag of groceries, we'll just say, and they've done a wonderful thing. Not belittling that at all, but that doesn't solve the problem. It helps. It gets you through. But realizing that it's more than just that box of grocery.
288. The food pantry is an amazing, amazing thing. However, the talk of it or the, you know, it's supposed to be confidential and it's not.

289. But it's not just a moment. Poverty is not just a moment. It's something that you have to work yourself out of. And if you beat the person down and you're tell them enough that they're not good enough or that you get enough of those phone calls from City Hall because I can tell you that I was not the only person that got that message, then you start to believe that you are never going to be good enough and you're too scared to.
290. Like I said, I never went back into city hall, you know whereas if they would've said, you know, even talk to me and said, you know, we know you're having a hard time, but we need the full payment. You know, what can we, how can, how can we go about this so we can get the full payment and you know, but instead it was shaming.
291. It was so much shame. And so if there's a way, and I don't know the way but to not shame the person when they're now, because then it just beats them down that much further and you don't know what is the hind, what happened? You don't know how I got there, how somebody got there.
292. Because like before the cancer, I was supporting my family wonderfully. It was the best income I'd ever had.
293. I didn't ask to be laid off. I didn't ask for the budget cuts, I didn't ask to have to go back on welfare.
294. You know, I did two years where I supported the boys and I fabulously wasn't my fault that you know, that I no longer had a job. So it's not always that someone is just wanting to live in poverty.
295. It's learning how to get out of it and then, you know, and it can happen to anybody and it can happen to everybody and it, and it's hard to hide it from your kids because you don't want them be down about it.
296. I was behind on the lunch bill, which I think most people end up behind on the lunch bill at some point. But they sent the note home with my son and they told him what the note was. And that was back before they started doing the emails, cause they do emails now, but, and that too was he was like, so does that mean we're not going to get to eat at school, mom? No, you're going to get to eat. We will figure it out. But he shouldn't have had to worry about what that was. Should have been my worry. And that teacher never should have told him what that note said.
297. No kid should have to feel like they should not have to fear whether they're going to get to eat or not because there's something that's going on between adults. Nor should they be told, you know, and, and I know every kid in the school knows that if you're the kid getting served that peanut butter sandwich instead of the hot meal, your family is the one who hasn't paid the lunch bill. You know? So there's no secret to it that kid is singled out and yes. Are they trying to do a nice thing by feeding them the peanut butter sandwich?
298. If it could happen, but it does like not treating someone like there is that divide, you know, because we all have things we're lacking. I don't care if you have \$1 million there's something we're all lacking. So why, treating everybody with the same respect.

299. Whether I walk in in a tattered jacket or an expensive jacket or whatever and still a person. Yeah. You know, kids, whether they, you know, whatever they come to school in, they're still human.
300. They're still real people with feelings, you know, not letting them know that they are the kids that live in low income. The kids that live does it.
301. But just the, the, the, the talking, the way people in a community, a small community especially cause there's no hiding from it. Like, I feel like sometimes if you were in a bigger town, you're, you don't stand out as much and you can go in some place and they not know.
302. But it is, it's like getting rid of that "us" and "them", that becoming, "we". We are Hill Town, we are community and there are so many people with huge hearts, Joe and so many people that want to help. And so many people that are trying, you know I can count on my hand far more people in Hill Town. Oh my hand, my toes, everything. Far more people in Hill Town that are generous and accepting. But it's those few that hurtful and have a negative idea of what it is, you know? But overall, the people in that community are very caring, very giving, very wanting to, to provide love and treat people well and to help. They really are, you know, so, but I don't know how to change the few that, you know, the people like the lady at the electric company. Yeah. Yeah.
303. They had a place for us to live. Food, clothes, bedding. Yeah.
304. And then the prayer service. And at first I did not understand why you would have candles like, and not upset. It just didn't make sense. I'm like, why do we have fire going on in here? And then within seconds I understood and I'm like, oh my gosh, this was so healing. This is so beautiful. This is so what we all need. And that was, that was like the first step of really healing and where I was like, okay, there can be beauty in flames also and there can be a piece. And yeah.
305. And that's pretty much when I knew we weren't going to be OK.
306. Oh my God. Well the church in Hill Town has been probably, and not just saying that because you're sitting across from me, the biggest, most awesome organization ever.
307. The Kiwanis club, they are just an amazing group. DH Bank, they may be a bank, but they are one of the most giving organizations as far as love and support. And I never feel like I'm banking when I go there. I feel like part of the family when I go there. Yeah. And then you Joy and John, my j's seriously the three of you have been so pivotal. Pivotal, that's the right word. Yeah. In all of this on, I always knew it didn't. Of course the dynamics have changed now, but I always knew what the three of you, no matter what, if I was in Cormorant, if I was in Hill Town, if I was in another place, I always knew I had the three of you. And I always know that you guys know that you have the three of us. And it's just been the most beautiful because we don't, one thing I love about the relationship that we've all had is we don't have to talk every day. You don't even talk every month. Yeah. And yet, you know it's there and you know that it's not changing. It's not going away. It's, it's,

- and it's a relationship that is forever. And, and that's huge because I don't think in life people come and go, you know, but this isn't one of those.
308. Losing him is probably the hardest thing I think I've ever had to face. And I think he was the closest, the closest thing to a husband I've ever had. And the man that I have led the furthest into my life and too bad I didn't realize it all till he was gone. Yeah. But I feel like I lost a piece of me.
309. These are the ones that you've named divorce, parenthood, a sick child, housing, daycare.
310. And I know we said divorce, but also I think its single parenting. I mean they know that they're different even though they're the same. Yeah. Because a lot of times I think people go into the next relationship so that they don't have to be a single parent. Right, right.
311. Yup, and even the education being in the midst of it, because I felt like I was succeeding at something after not feeling like I was succeeding. Yeah. All of a sudden there was success and getting on the Dean's list was, and then, I don't know if you know this, but I was the first ever Mayville State University leader in early childhood education and there's a big plaque with my name.
312. Um you, you're named an accident which was the, the vehicle, being laid off.
313. A fire.
314. An illness.
315. And it's cliché maybe, but until you've walked a mile in their shoes, you can't judge them and you don't know what put someone there. I came from a well to do father and when I was married we were doing fine financially, but because I wanted, I would have a very bad scenario, unhealthy, dangerous, and I left with nothing and he left. I shouldn't say nothing. A microwave and a bunkbed.
316. I didn't ask to be low income. I didn't thrive in being low income. I
317. People gave us things, which was very generous and nice. But if I could've done it all on my own, I would have much preferred and I had to have been the giver myself.
318. Not making it seem like it's a donation type that, you know, giving with a sense of respect, giving with some sort of dignity is so much more beautiful than giving because you have to..
319. I do want to say even though, cause there's some tough stuff in my life is great
320. We moved down here to, you know, give it a shot cause you know, I wanted to work with the beats and stuff like that. And of course my health just went as soon as we got here. So I wasn't able to go through with what I wanted to go through with.
321. It's just been bad, hard.
322. Since 2000 this, this was my 26th surgery. I have a, you know, fibromyalgia, I have dementia, I have a Parkinson's in neuropathy and

- you know I take probably what did I figure like 17 different pills a day for that.
323. I always feel sick, confused and hurt.
 324. I, we have nothing. We would get donations for Thanksgiving dinner. We would take that one donation right over and pass it onto the next person.
 325. I don't know if I'm cursed or what it is, but I asked people for just a little tiny bit of help and I just get "your nothing but a scammer...", You know, I'm like the worst person in the world and then everybody cuts me off.
 326. I want to work, but I just can't, you know, it hurts so bad.
 327. The first thing that I found real good was this church right here. Was really good. My granddaughter who just loves coming here. I tried to get here, but like I said, it's, I just, with what's going on with me, it's hard for me to just get myself to go out of the house.
 328. I do my praying and stuff like that at home.
 329. People I've met through the church and through coffee downstairs when I'm here, they're really nice. The people in this little town I've really liked. They are really good people.
 330. And, uh, somebody went down there and, uh, they're in a Christmas thing, you know, they do that, pay it forward thing and whatever around town. They, um, I had to get front tires on my truck, so they paid \$100. There was over \$300 when I got done. So they, and you know, use the a hundred dollars for that towards me. And then, uh, she put a hundred dollars onto like a gas tab for me to use back then.
 331. Gosh I'm going to start crying here.
 332. Poor little girl. And they were standing out front and just laughing at her.
 333. And that wasn't even including really any food to eat. So that's, that's why a person was, you know, trying to get a little help here and there. Cause it was just, you know, and it's just always, I, back then I was, I kept doing, I was just get passed around from his person to that person or this person, you know, I was filling out so many papers that I would just get frustrated with it.
 334. It's just been really tough. And then, you know, we slowly made it, the wife started cleaning houses and stuff. So we, you know, got, you know, up there to where we were, you know, being to where we could live again, not anything extra, but to where everything was paid and nobody was bothering us. And then I started getting sick a little bit here and there again.
 335. We were trying to live off of \$1,100 a month, that's pretty much vehicle, you know, go live in your vehicle. And we did that for about three months out in the parking lot at Walmart and, Lowes hardware.
 336. It's been really tough. It's to where a lot of times my mind is like ready to see, you know, that's it. But I just sit and think about my nine grandkids and my wife and everything we've been through and I just can't give up.

337. I try to do things nice for people. Yeah. It's tough to live when you have nothing.
338. I'm just so frustrated about trying as hard as I can to where I'm ready to give up and just drop. I'm so tired, you know, like right now on just wore out.
339. I get so confused cause I'm so tired . . . I'm just so wore out. I got two I got to take care of. And try to do it.
340. Snow it snows out. So I'm outside trying to, you know what, I'll put the, Oh hang this down off the bottom of my jacket and he was my other arm and then I'll take my foot when my shovel gets full and kick it. Yeah. I was out there the other morning for about two and a half hours to go from the garage to the house.
341. It seems like I'm almost at the top of that hill and there's the big goat sitting up there and comes flying and starting all over again.
342. In this move right here, cause of all my surgeries, this move that we'd done here was actually like our 32nd move. And we've been, we're going to be married 36 years.
343. It all looks good. You know, you're in there looking good, feeling good and boom, something happens. You know, we were stopped.
344. We were set up all right. Boom. Triple bypass, heart surgery.
345. I try to be there for, for people, even the ones struggling and biting and scratching. I'm doing whenever I can. I mean, like right now we have a package of hot dogs, their home and a couple of loaves of bread. Yeah. And that's how hard it is right now. Yeah. No, it's just, it's just, yeah. You're going to run up to the dollar place when they get down here. You don't see what we can get up there as cheaply. We don't have much at all.
346. We just make sure Karly is taken care of. Yeah. Right, right. Who cares me, I could care less what happens to me as long as those two are okay.
347. A couple of weeks ago when we started talking about moving and because we have nothing. We don't really know. And the people we rent from, I don't know what, you know, the sons of silence, motorcycle guys, I don't know if we would get behind or something, you know, they would all come flying all there as a gang group or wherever or, you know what I'm saying?
348. The head guy or whatever he was, he's the one that started saying, and you're nothing but a Scammer. Um, what are you trying to do to us? You know, because he thought I was going to try to sue them, this is the last thing on my mind. I want to help people and don't want to take nothing away from them.
349. I'm not out there to take anything from anybody.
350. If I can do something in return to pay him back or whatever, I will, I might not have money to give him back, but maybe they need a ride somewhere or something
351. Before I got up enough nerve to see if I could get your help to load the truck up. I asked on Facebook, you know, I, I put a little thing on there

- and I asked for so-called friends if on such and such date, if they could round up some of their friends and just come out for a couple hours, we'd make snacks. . . and blah, blah, blah, you know, and um, you know, nobody, nobody came back like normal.
352. Well I guess, you know, I'm dead to everybody now. . . cause a family don't answer. Friends don't answer. Nobody wants to answer me.
353. The way the world lives nowadays, nobody cares really, not like they did when I was younger. It was so, I mean if somebody even seen you knew you'd have to ask for help if they just seen that you will struggle and they would help with them, they would just, they would just, you know, like bring a whole bunch of corn out of their garden or a bunch of potato, you know, they'd just bring it to you. You didn't even know you'd have a bag sitting on your steps when you came back from somewhere or something. Now it's like, you know, nobody would even give you one potato to share between three people nowadays.
354. I know that there's a lot of people out there that are, are really, really good people that I sure wish I could find them again.
355. Initially somebody was hurting and we would help each other out. Never even asked.
356. I wish I could just get somehow snap my fingers change it all.
357. If people would actually listen to what I'm telling you right now and maybe understand where I'm coming from and my family's coming from and what we're trying to do with nothing.
358. And there's so many people around this area that I've seen. You've got everything that I've wanted my whole entire life that I'll never see.
359. A person don't need money to be happy, you know, but, uh, you know, friends and people understanding to me a pat on the back and a thank you or you know, how you're doing, or no, I go hang out and have a cup of coffee, you know, that, that kind of stuff. Yeah. I mean, a thank you or a pat on the back when I was going up made me feel so good and I'd rather have that than any kind of money, you know?
360. If there's anything I can do I'll do what I can for you or anybody else out there.
361. I'm challenged every time I take a breath. I try to hold back tears all the time cause of my pain.

APPENDIX F: FOCUS GROUP *IN VIVO* CODES

1. It's probably the shame. By the shame, they won't admit to people. They're really hurting.
2. What I got out of it was stereotyping. Like living in low income housing. Putting them down a peg. There's good people that live there, it's not their fault. This is happening. We've got one guy that had major surgery, 90% of the problems. A lot of this is health insurance. If there's a way that that could be corrected
3. People are very proud, will not ask because of it goes with this shame.
4. But that has something to do with US trusting each other and that's, that makes me sad.
5. One lady did say that people were good at Hill Town.
6. Once she trusted us, we trusted or whatever. . . it goes both ways I suppose.
7. I was interested in the cycles. I wonder how you break that cycle.
8. I think how you treat one person; grandma, grandpa, mom, dad, on all the way through, goes way back to way they were brought up.
9. They don't know how to live any better.
10. People haven't been given the opportunities.
11. We have some biases.
12. We don't really know. . . if you haven't lived it.
13. But you could imagine what the kids of these parents how tough it is them.
14. It's very tough.
15. The kids don't want other kids to know.
16. The kids know.
17. I think kids know they got a problem, but I don't think they know that some kids are going hungry.
18. From a kid's point of view, some kids don't have a lot.
19. I think that's one of the things with that Wednesday night service. At least here, at least kids are getting some food, some place.
20. We started that backpack program.
21. Because I know Pam's sister over in Cooperstown would call them sack lunches, pack up sack lunches every Friday, send them home. She said some of that slowly improved the kids what the kids got over the weekend. Is that.
22. Interesting enough and Joe, I'm sure you're aware of this, as that was put in place and she works the hardest on it. She wanted to be very discreet because you have biases and things that people have about the shame or difficult feelings that people experience on both sides I think.

23. We don't know how to deal with it. And so it becomes a, I don't want to say a bad thing, but you know, for lack of a better word right now.
24. I think they recognize that there was a problem and they just couldn't get over that.
25. You're treated differently when you don't have the money.
26. I think there's part of the surprise knowing that there are people in our community that are having problems like that. We don't see.
27. It's been that way. But usually we don't see it in school.
28. When I was growing up, we didn't have a pile of money, but we were okay.
29. I wonder if we can tell or we think we can tell.
30. I think we think we can tell.
31. Because we have our notions of what it would look like and I'm not sure.
32. But the gist that I got out of this, the one big problem and I think at least two cases, mention child care. They can't work because it costs more to get the kid in childcare than what they earn. That's a problem. Yeah. And it's not, you know, and that nothing to be ashamed of. I mean, good Lord, my own son, when they had child care. It cost \$1,000 a month. No, that's a big, that's a big problem with single parents. Especially if you got to a little baby, you're going to totally go into pre-kindergarten or a hollow release start up stuff. Um, the cost of child care in any can only work while the behavior kid is in childcare? Well, there's only so many jobs and they say, oh, you can go to work at Burger King or someplace like that. Well, my gosh, what you earn their hurting the page, the brim, let alone buy them diapers and clothes, medical supplies and food. And then you've got to get to work.
33. If you're on welfare, even If you do work, you can only work so many hours or are you lose your welfare.
34. I think that the church has a leadership role in opening all together on this cause that's where, that's where you start.
35. But the thing is, you don't know who the people are sometimes. Call it intrusion in your life.
36. Do you go ask them, do you need help? Do you want the help?
37. You know, you got to leave it up to God or whatever the lead ships, what you want to cruise.
38. It's a hard, it's a hard subject.
39. It moved me to want to listen more, look harder, pay better attention, and be more intentional about being sensitive to people's income. I think, I know I haven't looked it up for all that, but I think we'd be surprised how much income qualifies for poverty level. I think we'd be really surprised. No, even for not so much. But no. The kids a pro free and reduced lunch. No. WIC. Oh, I mean I think we'd all be surprised to how high, how much income you can make and still qualify for us for that, which is a great thing. But I just think that, I have to remember to stand back and think about what if we're going to look at income, how much income people can make and still be living in poverty. I guess I'd

- have better informed, better importantly, see, think all of that. And I have, that's all I have to say.
40. I think some of the guidelines for welfare system should be changed.
 41. I mean I have a daughter that was on the WIC program and stuff like that.
 42. How can we as a community in other ways help support people that are in that situation? Like what, what can we do in addition to government?
 43. So having been a product of this whole thing myself, it would have been pretty tremendous if there was, you know, in church years ago we used to have, if somebody came new into the church, you had a buddy, but when they called I met a mentor or somebody so that you saw somebody in Church and oh yeah, I know that person.
 44. I'll go hang out with that person. You know, you're alone when you're in poverty.
 45. And it wouldn't be really nice if, if in our community we have a connection, if they had a connection to somebody established, then they're not alone. And through that connection builds confidence, builds other connections to other people.
 46. You are truly alone when you're in poverty.
 47. And I think this project hopefully will continue to open up the ears and maybe find some solutions, but you know, and maybe they won't be, maybe they wouldn't appreciate it, but I think our family would have really liked somebody, a friendly face. And that was 40 years ago so, times have changed. That's what I would suggest.
 48. It's a big problem. I mean, we chew a little bit at a time.
 49. I guess, I know, for different reasons. I know that people get frustrated with adults that are in this situation, but if we can remember that there are children that are affected, I believe that adults are valuable, but well, sometimes adults are making decisions and, and there are consequences to those. And they are so deep in that that they're forgetting that their children are, are being affected. We can't lose sight of that ever.
 50. The amount of children. That's quite high.
 51. I think it's really masked in the community.
 52. I think people do a good job of fitting in because of probably the shame that is associated with it.
 53. It's heartbreaking as a parent to think of kids that may not have food on the table. Or my thing is this time of year is warm clothing took a lot with and I wish that there were ways, especially if like for my family who has lots of kids, there's always something going hand-me-downs available and if there was ever a need, I wish there was willingness to call.
 54. I thought your sermon brought it from a concept of hunger to something measurable and more personal to be local.
 55. I think we all understand the word hunger but we've never so closely aligned it with what's going on here in Hill Town

56. To your point about when you are talking with the young person, that youth night, you hadn't seen them for a while and they said they had been having a hard time because their father was out of work. I would have no idea how long the person's father was out or if they were alright, but in our area, especially in winter now that cause a whole lot of different problems. Transportation and heating, the coats for walking to school or anything like that.
57. Would be nice to have a spot where we could have conversation with those people here trying to help them.
58. That was my main thing about your sermon, how do we implement, how can we do?
59. It's overwhelming when a person looks at it individually and trying to figure out, because you do, there is a lot of shame that people have and are, our notion is we don't want to embarrass them. How do you say, how can I help?
60. It makes you more aware how frivolous we are. Instead of stopping at Starbucks. How about just throwing another \$5 in a kitty somewhere.
61. It was nice to hear the [Minnesota] Twins hire homeless.
62. I'd be willing to bet that was one tidbit those kids took away that they'll never forget.
63. Church is certainly going to be a focal point for us if we have ideas or things that we could bring to the church, bring to you, bring to Cindy, bring to Julie, or Brenda.
64. Pay it forward is such a big deal.
65. This is maybe just a simple little thing, but I think so many times I'm a good one to make a big crock pot full of chili or something and bring hot food to people. How do you do that? And I know one or two people isn't a lot, but it's something.
66. I know I was just floored really blind.
67. Maybe citizens could buy like gift cards at the cafe and I know that I would assume that the counselor at the elementary school or even in high school would have good knowledge of those in need and they could more discretely hand them out and that way there's no association.
68. You come in with a normal gift card, just like anyone would come in with a gift card and you wouldn't have that associated shame. Not that I'm saying everyone has shame, but I know that's a big deal.
69. And perception of the public is a huge deal too and it's kind of, especially with IEP,
70. People don't want others to know.
71. So a lot of people never knew what it was like.
72. I think our goal is helping those who need help.
73. We don't know how to go about doing it. Or we don't know how to get what we have people who need it.
74. So if we as a church can be the conduit to help those that want to help, I think our impact and reach would go further.

75. I enjoyed the point in the sermon about Wednesday night meals. We know that there are youth and children that come here for the meal, is there a way that we can do more of that or not? Here's a meal for the poor people or people can come to meal. We don't want to single them out.
76. It that struck me as some something that we can do that would make a big impact on people without singling them out.
77. I have thought about this since last Sunday, when you were saving the sermon for today. Would it be the worst thing, if we can somehow certain days in a month, just have a Crockpot meal waiting here for anybody that wants to come and eat?
78. Or would it be worth it if they have the access to cook the food or heat the food? Could we make meals and freeze them and hand them? I mean, yes.
79. I think Joe would be a good resource because he could means of delivery, whereas we could be the ones assisting or I don't know if that would probably be overwhelming to, to us.
80. We are more than willing to do that.
81. Oh, there's money. Can you donate it to the church and then you distribute it?
82. You get it to who needs it.
83. Probably the expression of the least of these and understanding that we are all the least of these.
84. The thing that bothers me is how we naturally judge and shame people. It's so sad. I sit, sit, and I think about how I've acted. You know, I remember years ago when, when, when they had the food stamps or coupons and you'd be in line at the grocery store and the person in front of you, a single mother or somebody, and here they're pulling out those coupons and you sit there and you look, you know, and it's pretty bad.
85. It's sad that we do that.
86. We have to shame people.
87. It's natural to shame. Somebody that is having a tough time.
88. Criticizing somebody for something, is wanting to shame them. Is so terribly much worse.
89. Why did we do it? Does it make us feel better? It shouldn't.
90. You know a person should stand in the, in the grocery line and be thankful that the person in front of you is getting some help and can get some food. But what you, you judge, you stand back there and that's that, that kind of shows we're actually putting ourselves lower than the person in front of you.
91. We all fall short, you know.
92. I sit here and think of these Bible verses that we're going through, you know, and the, and the day when we're facing God and he says, "you gave food to the poor" and all this and you'll you answer saying, "well, I tried to do the best I could. I did this and I did that". And that isn't why you do it. You know, you should just naturally

93. You don't do it for the glory of yourself.
94. There is a strong connection between being fed, and faith.
95. When you were talking about addiction, you don't overcome it on your own. You don't come to faith on our own either.
96. Why are we here at the Bible study? Let me mention how fortunate we are to be born where we are, the parents that we've got without them I wouldn't be here. Would Joe, be a pastor without his wonderful parents? On his own. I don't think so.
97. Since I've started coming here, I find that think you guys have noticed this. There's lots of deep questions in our society that that bother me and then I try to find it. It seemed like such complicated times.
98. We always hear that there's so many complicated issues and yet, Joe, every time I read this, I start to realize it's really not that complicated. These issues aren't new. They've been here ever since the existence of human beings.
99. The question is, will we actually take what we read and apply it? Not just, well, we're sitting in church for one hour on a Sunday, but maybe that's why I'm coming here on Wednesday. Maybe it takes twice a week to, to kind of start to realize that the answers aren't that difficult.
100. Perhaps sometimes we forget that we need to consider scripture a little bit and, and find answers in a book that probably has a lot more answers whether we like them or not. And that's the problem I struggle with is whether we like them or not. Because sometimes I know what's right. I just kind of liked my money and I like I like my greed and I like not having to look at some of the issues that are out there of hunger and poor. And if I don't have to deal with them and can just lock myself away, then I don't, then I can just pretend they don't exist. Unfortunately, every minute we wake up and go outside and start to catch on real quick, they do.
101. It's pretty hard to be a good Christian and just look the other way.
102. Faith is hard. Doing the right thing is Not Easy.
103. This bible study puts it on the street level. We need it in the morning.
104. This Bible study to me for the last few years has gave me peace. I went through some tough times the last couple of years and it feels good to be here. It's a guiding light.
105. Sometimes we have to let God work through us. Let him lead us.
106. Again. That's hard.
107. It was a lot easier though when you are totally in his hands. I get reminded of that once in a while.
108. The first paragraph in Matthew that is the most comforting part of the Bible, I think right there. Those verses, I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink.
109. Well, having been the recipient of some of these things, this was, I'm really glad to see that expanded the fresh vegetables and fruit because that was never around.
110. I thought it was a great, a great thing.

111. I would say we served about 75 people or family households.
112. We took ten or box of into the school.
113. I've found it to be uplifting and enjoying watching the passion of the people that do this every day and how good made me feel that we were obviously addressing a cause.
114. I did have to keep my biases in check at times. I found myself thinking my family would have a hard time eating all this produce at one time, you know?
115. I had to keep reminding myself that it's not up to me to sit and think.
116. The event was really well managed and organized.
117. The quality and the variety of food was a surprise to me. I did not expect to have that kind of selection or that amount of food available.
118. Just really the gratitude I felt radiating from the recipients today. They really just warmed me to the bone. I mean, the one lady was just completely thankful for that baked potato.
119. They're not asking for the moon. They want potatoes to make baked potatoes.
120. How many other vehicles, saw car seats?
121. I thought it was incredibly effective.
122. To name the name biases I think are really important.
123. It's important to be aware of those biases and yet find ways to overcome them and still be able to partner.
124. They might even have a vehicle or maybe they got vehicle and something gas can happen, you know, illness and family and medical. And so you still needed a vehicle?
125. One of the things I found helpful was the discussions with the other volunteers.
126. I felt comfortable walking up to anybody on that line and introducing myself and asking them their name, the guy with the bison hat I, you know, where I wouldn't do that on the street.
127. So when you have a common mission like that, it, it, it stimulates conversation I think.
128. It really reinforced the joy there is them being part of giving or the part of providing or for others.
129. Just when I see the car seats come in, especially as a new mom, it's, it's something where I'm helping put food or some child's belly tonight, they're going to have mashed potatoes and gravy perhaps. And I'm thinking of, Oh, they're going to be laughing, having a pear or I'm, I'm putting myself in your shoes going through the line.
130. So it just really goes to show that we're, we're always here to give. And even if you're not able to get, you want to help in some way, shape or form.
131. I'm reminded as I need to be reminded that I have a whole shallow, my life can be at times when I'm cranky because I don't want to get up in the morning and I'm never hungry. I don't worry about where my next meal is going to come from. And here these people are feeding families and

the car seats in the car and so grateful for having fresh produce, you know, and I need to do these things often to, to keep that in the forefront.

132. I'm always reminded that for those people, the scarcity or wondering am I going to have enough money for food all month, year?
133. I had to check my biases. Some of the political views and theological views of some of the other folks who were volunteers and they're here, they wanted to serve to,
134. The amount of food they had, the amount of variety, the lineup that was a lot more than I expected.
135. There wasn't a whole lot of younger people.
136. We just had a food drive for the college kids over spring break.
137. Growing up, we lived on a farm and we have a lot of good farm grown food to eat and never were hungry, but they had cheese, commodities that people could go into town and get bricks of cheese.
138. There were no parameters on this, anybody was welcome to come.
139. Why wouldn't more people come? Because there are no questions. Is it because they don't want to be seen in a place like that?
140. I didn't know quite what to expect.
141. My mom would go get the cheese, you know, she would, it was fine and they wanted people to come and get it. So that was kind of what reminded me of this situation where anybody could come.
142. I can do it again. Absolutely. I'd be happy to sign up again or just show up.
143. How could we serve these people in other ways besides putting food in the back of their vehicle? Like I wanted to give flu shots and we could put in a little ministry card, like Jesus loves you and put it, I mean, how did that, we had to focus on giving out food today and part of me wanted to do so much more.
144. It's true of any social program, mine included, but we never have any answers. I always want to get to the root cause versus that this the band aid that we're slapping on it.
145. I can identify the problem but I'm not making it better.
146. She graduated from high school and she started college that through social services or whatever program that she was supported, food stamps. And helping with rent or just all the things and so that she could go to school and be mother at the same time.

APPENDIX G: BASELINE SURVEY *IN VIVO* CODES

1. Homeless
2. Unemployed
3. Hunger
4. Hungry
5. Struggling to pay bills
6. Don't have money for food
7. Unfortunate
8. Uneducated
9. Circumstances
10. Inflationary effects
11. Food
12. Disadvantaged
13. Single parent
14. Needy
15. Desperation
16. Desolate
17. Depressed
18. Sorrow
19. Poor
20. Surviving
21. In need
22. Helplessness
23. Income
24. Depressed
25. Unemployment
26. Lonely
27. Elderly
28. Dirty
29. Struggle
30. Deprived
31. Unsecure
32. Lack of food
33. Food
34. Common
35. Stressed
36. Food
37. Food
38. Food
39. Old
40. Large family

41. Cold
42. Public assistance
43. No home
44. Lazy
45. Empathy
46. Poor/stagnant wages
47. Less Opportunity
48. Shelter
49. Unlucky
50. Hard working
51. Sad
52. Sadness
53. Scared
54. Deprivation
55. Malnutrition
56. Desperation
57. Sorry
58. Support
59. Discouraged
60. Addiction
61. Essentials
62. Desperate
63. Lack of education
64. Despondent
65. Single parent
66. Shabby
67. Despair
68. Hardship
69. Jobless
70. Deprived of essential needs
71. No shelter
72. Underpaid
73. Unstable housing
74. Clothing
75. Children
76. Fatigued
77. Housing
78. Neglect
79. Irresponsible
80. Shelter
81. Shelter
82. Beard
83. Clothing
84. Scared
85. Poor clothing
86. No doctor

87. Unable
88. Need
89. Shattered nuclear family
90. Unable to improve situation
91. Clothes
92. Children
93. Help
94. Depressed
95. Embarrassment
96. Afraid
97. Fear
98. Empathy
99. Struggling
100. Help
101. Hardship
102. Shame
103. Scarce
104. Struggling
105. Needs
106. Unskilled
107. Single parent
108. Depressed
109. Transportation
110. Children
111. Pitiful
112. Struggling
113. Destitution
114. Penny-less
115. Financial issues
116. Lost
117. Unable to provide basic needs
118. Hopeless
119. Potential mental health
120. Shelter
121. Compromised
122. Clothing
123. Abuse
124. Unnecessary
125. Health
126. Oppressed mental problems
127. Living with relatives
128. Standing on the street begging
129. Un-kept
130. Poorly Dressed
131. Families with sudden loss of income from Health issues, job loss, domestic violence, etc.

132. Seething anger and resentment
133. Sad Faces
134. Mentally ill
135. Someone who has lost their jobs
136. Bums
137. People I see walking downtown large city
138. Low income
139. Single Moms
140. People living on the street
141. Male
142. Hungry children
143. Someone sleeping on the street
144. Run down
145. Bridges
146. Drug addicts
147. A person who struggled through school and has trouble getting a "good" full-time job
148. Not dressed warm enough in winter
149. Young people
150. Street people
151. Divorced women
152. No shelter
153. Quiet
154. Someone living in a shelter
155. Disheveled appearance
156. Living outside
157. Disheveled, older male war veteran
158. Separation
159. Destitute and sad
160. Older
161. Underprivileged
162. Middle age man
163. Disheveled
164. Adults to include elderly
165. Pan handlers
166. Veterans
167. Down on their luck
168. Dirty clothes
169. Don't know- I think there are a lot of people who are but we don't know them and can't tell by how they look.
170. Drug addict
171. Mentally ill
172. Children- students
173. Those that respect themselves and would never let anyone know they are struggling
174. Kids with a roof over them but not a stable home.

175. Not dressed in current weather clothes
176. Alcohol and drug abuse
177. Men
178. Problems
179. Wish we could do more
180. Living in shelters
181. All their belongings in a bag
182. Health Problems
183. Veterans with health issues
184. A broken family structure - generational.
185. No eye contact
186. Shabby Clothes
187. Mental issues
188. Families
189. People without extended family for support
190. Desolate
191. Drugs
192. Alcohol/drug addicts
193. Low self esteem
194. Drug addicts
195. People without the means to meet all their needs
196. Alcoholic
197. People without the proper winter clothing.
198. Someone living out of a bag
199. Poor hygiene
200. A person who struggles with low self-esteem/confidence who doesn't know how to get help to a good path
201. Sickly
202. Those who have lost jobs
203. People who can't manage money
204. Destitute
205. Unable to look you in the eye
206. People living with distant family or friends
207. Tattered
208. Poorly clothed
209. Young drug or alcohol addict
210. Desperation
211. Un-kept and lost
212. Alone
213. Drug addict/alcoholic
214. Quiet-secluded
215. Children
216. Scrubby clothes
217. Abused people
218. Possibly have a dependency problem
219. Un-kept appearance

220. Mentally ill
221. Young and unstable
222. Families
223. Those that want all the hand out that they can get and they don't do anything to try to better themselves
224. People not capable or willing to help themselves.
225. More shy/quiet
226. Life style
227. Loss of jobs
228. Bad choices
229. Poor education
230. Laziness
231. Illness
232. Buy things not needed
233. Illness, loss of ability to work
234. Poor Management
235. Health issues
236. Globalist attack on God, family, national Sovereignty. Where we are is by design.
237. Situational
238. Mental and Physical Health Issues
239. Unemployment
240. Medical catastrophe
241. Mental illness
242. Loss of jobs
243. Environment
244. Sickness
245. Health reasons that prevent them from working
246. Lack of good education or job training
247. Habits
248. Life choices (drugs/alcohol/addiction)
249. Circumstances out of their control, loss of job.
250. Lack of education
251. Addictions to a bad habit
252. Loss of job
253. Physical or mental problems
254. Lack of opportunities
255. Family cycle/never learned how to break out of poverty cycle
256. Lack of training/education
257. Education
258. Loss of job
259. Unemployment
260. Circumstance
261. Substance abuse

262. Inability to maintain a job due to mental instability or drug/alcohol addiction or Inability of obtain a well-paying job due to Lack of education
263. Mental Health issues
264. Inadequate education/resources
265. Disability
266. Poor spending choices
267. Medical
268. Misfortune
269. Health issues
270. Lack of knowledge
271. Economic downturn in the US.
272. Tough times- out of there control, i.e.-lost Job, became disabled
273. Job insecurity
274. Medical expenses
275. Loss and depression
276. Some it is not by choice, something has happened in their life that they are working very hard to correct and make themselves better. (Silent poor)
277. Poor upbringing.
278. Things just happen
279. Life style
280. Bad circumstances
281. Drugs alcohol
282. Loss of job
283. Will not take any kind of job
284. Mental and emotional issues
285. No work desire
286. Job loss
287. Inflation (97% loss of dollars value). Wages NEVER keep up with inflation, makes an attack on the above occur. In desperation to the effects of their sins people pursue the devil's wishes. See: moral and civic decay- Hollywood, abortions, gay/tranny nonsense, porn, and on and on and on.
288. Depression
289. Expenses exceed income
290. Poor family upbringing
291. Medical bills
292. Alcohol
293. Home life
294. Alcohol/drug addiction
295. Choice
296. Priorities are mixed up
297. Health issues, no insurance, large bills.
298. Loss of employment
299. Laziness when it comes to wanting to work

300. Debt
301. Unmotivated, lack of resources
302. Life happens
303. Major life event sends person into depression/addiction cycle, can't hold job, Gets too far behind
304. Not wanting to work
305. Tragic event in their life
306. Job opportunity
307. Poor pay
308. Major health issues
309. Depression
310. Weak or breakdown of family structure
311. Loss of job
312. Depression
313. Being raised by a family in poverty who are not aware of resources to better the next generation (i.e. financial aid for college, etc.)
314. Alcohol, drug, gambling addictions
315. Mental issues
316. Lack of support or resources
317. Unemployment
318. High medical costs
319. Unable to find employment
320. Lack resources
321. They may have not learned coping skills in how to survive adversity (I.e. planning to save for a rainy day).
322. Bad choices- chose to do drugs, or something illegal and now they are not employable.
323. Health problems that interfere with employment
324. Mental health that is untreated
325. Some are poor by choice, abuse of drug, system to get hand out, neglect
326. Circumstances out of their control.
327. Lack of awareness from others around them
328. Circumstances out of their control. i.e. health
329. Education

APPENDIX H: END LINE SURVEY *IN VIVO* CODES

1. Hungry
2. Hunger
3. Not money to buy food
4. Homeless
5. Frustrated
6. Help
7. Strong
8. Single parents
9. Unlucky
10. Sadness
11. Malnourished
12. In need
13. Poor
14. Unemployed
15. Sad
16. Help
17. Pride
18. Desperate
19. Struggling
20. Not working
21. Children
22. Shelter
23. Helplessness
24. Substandard housing
25. Young
26. Helpless
27. Addiction
28. Undisciplined
29. Money
30. Despair
31. Challenged
32. Health issues
33. Un-kept
34. Meagerness
35. Helpless children
36. Lack of education
37. Separated
38. Anyone
39. Afraid
40. Not a home

41. Disability
42. Unfair
43. Sympathy
44. Cycle
45. Jobless
46. Help
47. Jobless
48. Destitute
49. Hopelessness
50. Hoping
51. Loss of job
52. Shelter
53. Circumstances
54. Shame
55. Jobless
56. Loneliness
57. Useless
58. Feels alone
59. Shame
60. Invisible
61. Food
62. Hopeless
63. Food insecurity
64. Disadvantaged
65. Warm clothes
66. Worried
67. Addict
68. Food
69. Jobless
70. Poor job outcome
71. Depression
72. Dirty
73. Poor money management
74. Embarrassing
75. Poor choices
76. Disillusioned
77. Ashamed
78. No warm clothes
79. No money
80. Drug or drunk
81. Unfortunate
82. Concern
83. Helplessness
84. Lonely
85. Inadequate housing
86. Uneducated

87. Inequity
88. Silent suffering
89. Hardship
90. Isolated
91. Medical issues
92. Stress
93. Needy
94. Cold
95. Befriend
96. Depression
97. Sickness
98. Hopeful
99. Cold
100. Addiction issues
101. Anxiety
102. Systemic
103. Clothing
104. Hardship
105. Hopeless
106. Cycle
107. Fuel
108. Scared
109. Elderly
110. Unlucky
111. Home
112. Jobless
113. Uneducated
114. Anxiety
115. Struggling
116. Hardship
117. Rundown house
118. Cold
119. Repeating cycle
120. Silent
121. Struggling
122. Invisible
123. Illness
124. Cold
125. Elderly
126. Unfortunate
127. On drugs
128. Families
129. Someone with addictions
130. An older man, maybe a vet, who id disabled
131. Anyone (could happen to any of us)
132. A person moving a lot

133. Young
134. No money
135. A person on a street corner in a bigger city begging for money.
136. Someone poorly dressed
137. People living on the street
138. Middle age/older men
139. I see it as a life style for some, a traveler
140. Jobless
141. Young Families
142. People who have had bad life circumstances
143. Young man living in his car
144. Mental problems
145. Drugs/alcohol addicts
146. Older people
147. Family's living in autos...
148. Independents
149. Older person
150. Someone with a cardboard sign
151. Financial catastrophe experienced
152. Single mothers
153. Un-kept physical appearance
154. Women and children in shelters
155. Male veteran
156. Children
157. A person who wanders asking for money
158. Hardworking
159. Elderly
160. Dirty hair/clothes
161. Old man on the street begging for food
162. Un-kept appearance
163. Individuals holding signage at intersections
164. Middle aged
165. Lost
166. Unanticipated circumstances
167. Ungroomed/dirty
168. Helpless-children
169. Living in their car
170. Person, usually a male, sitting on the side of the road
171. Run down
172. Someone too proud to let anyone know
173. Any age
174. Young
175. Bad Choices
176. Un-kept people
177. Living with others
178. Unclean

179. Former Military
180. Someone who is jobless
181. A woman who had to leave an abusive relationship
182. Scraggly
183. Jobless
184. Uneducated
185. No home
186. A person who has a cardboard box as their shelter
187. Standing by a fire for warmth
188. Runaway teens
189. I picture a single parent with kids
190. Troubled Homes - single parents
191. Veterans
192. People with feelings of helplessness and isolation
193. Veteran
194. Struggles with addiction
195. Abandonment cases
196. Veterans
197. Family's living in abandoned structures.
198. Resourceful
199. Single parent
200. Someone with dirty clothing
201. Families
202. Children
203. Unclean/inadequate clothing
204. Individuals sleeping on streets in cities
205. Youth
206. Elderly
207. Disheveled
208. Caring
209. Young
210. Tired
211. A family sitting at a shelter
212. In a vehicle full of stuff
213. Depression/despair
214. People using shopping carts with all their belongings
215. Men
216. Depressed
217. Mental health issues
218. Malnourished
219. Undereducated
220. Military veteran
221. Drug user
222. Tired
223. Not wanting to work
224. Extenuating circumstances

225. Anyone
226. Uneducated
227. Can't handle money
228. Loss of job
229. Disabilities
230. Poor Management
231. Health Reasons
232. Trapped in a cycle
233. Loss of job
234. Medical expenses
235. Inequality
236. Medical costs
237. Bad life choices
238. No job
239. Illiteracy- not by choice. Couldn't afford education. Couldn't get a job.
240. Drug addiction
241. Loss of job
242. Medical issues
243. Bad choices at a young age
244. Health Issues - Mental Health - Addiction
245. Medical expenses
246. You don't always "become poor" some are born into it
247. Hard life health circumstances
248. Emotional trauma affects ability to get or keep a job
249. Unemployment
250. Unexpected life events / sickness
251. Sickness unable to pay medical bills
252. Loss of jobs
253. Lack of marketable skills
254. Illness
255. Life event, such as medical issue
256. Medical catastrophe
257. Health issues/expenses
258. Born into repetitive cycle
259. Circumstance
260. Lose job suddenly
261. Life situations such as a loss of job
262. Way they were raised
263. Low paying jobs
264. Taught to be poor
265. Drug and/or alcohol dependency
266. Poor self esteem
267. Situations beyond their control
268. Health conditions
269. Lack of opportunity
270. Poor life choices

271. Overspending-debt
272. Life choices
273. Lose their job (usually because of drug or alcohol addiction)
274. They never finish school
275. Though things they cannot control
276. Poor choices- lack of education, drinking, drugs
277. Grew up in poverty
278. Circumstances
279. Mental Health
280. Some have bad luck, debt, no crop, illness
281. Haven't learned to cook
282. Drugs alcohol
283. Circumstances
284. Health-uneducated
285. Born into Poverty
286. Unfortunate circumstances
287. Hardships
288. Lose their job and can't find another one
289. Depression
290. Under privileged, lack of resources
291. Born into poverty
292. How grew up
293. Illness- couldn't afford health care- can't work.
294. Loss of jobs
295. Medical issues
296. Loss of job
297. Mental illness
298. Health
299. Unable to hold a job
300. Loss, in many forms job, loved one, self, etc.
301. Loss of work opportunity
302. Addiction affects ability to get or keep a job
303. Mental health problems
304. No support system
305. Loss of jobs
306. Poor or no education, nor no job training.
307. Lack of thoughtful support and shared decisions
308. Addiction problems
309. Lack of education
310. Loose job
311. Familial cycle
312. Loss of job, medical conditions
313. Cyclical
314. Can't afford medications/healthcare
315. Drugs/substance abuse
316. Single parent

317. Financial struggle
318. Lack of affordable childcare
319. Undisciplined
320. Losing their job
321. Mental health issues
322. Lack of motivation
323. Medical
324. Lack of connecting to what they need to help them
325. Unanticipated circumstances
326. Traumatic experience/events
327. Unable to overcome upbringing/uncontrollable circumstances
328. Medical condition
329. Serious medical problems
330. Poor money management
331. Through things they could control (drugs)
332. Mental health
333. Illness/addiction

APPENDIX I: INTERVENTION #1 NEWSLETTER

Silent Poverty

Listening to silent voices. As a component of my doctorate research concerning rural poverty I interviewed four people who are experiencing (or have experienced) poverty with at least one child in the household or had at least one child in the household in Hill Town. Here is what they said;

Interview with Lee (female)

- “I didn’t ask to be low-income.”
- “When people found out we lived in low income housing, there was a look. I hated that look. I didn’t want my kids to see that look.”
- “I’ve never not worked full time.”
- “It was shaming. It was so much shame.”
- “My kid. . . he shouldn’t have had to worry.”
- “No kid should have to fear if they will eat or not.”
- “There are so many people with huge hearts. . . but it’s those few that are hurtful.”
- “I thought I would die young and my boys would be left without a mom. And sure enough, I got diagnosed with my cancer.”
- “People think help is a one-time thing. . . but it doesn’t solve the problem.”
- “People I didn’t even know showed up and helped me.”
- “We were poor in materials but we were rich in community.”
- “Hill Town has amazing people!”

Interview with Jean (female)

- “My parents never had money but worked hard.”
- “I went to school at night. I worked during the day.”
- “I didn’t understand how to be a single poor mom.”
- “You don’t have to feel shame because you don’t have money.”
- “When we first moved here (to Hill Town) we were outsiders. And there was a lot of loneliness.”
- “When I came back, it was so interesting because all these people now suddenly expressed care.”
- “Some of these choices are truly life and death.”
- “I couldn’t afford a babysitter.”
- “I got sick. I didn’t have medical insurance.”
- “I could feel myself disappearing.”
- “In Hill Town, you don’t see the poverty.”
- “I always had faith. Faith in God. Faith in myself. Faith in my child.”
- “It is truly devastating and they are suffering in silence.”
- “People will think less of me if they know I’m not doing well.”

- “We have some baseline prejudices.”
- “There’s a look. It’s really subliminal, but it’s there.”
- “We can’t do everything but we can do something.”
- “People were really gracious when I opened myself up for help.”

Interview with Randy (male)

- “I always feel sick, confused and hurt.”
- “I don’t know if I am cursed or what.”
- “What do you do? Go live in your vehicle? We did that for 3 months out in the parking lot at Walmart and Lowes Hardware.”
- “I just can’t give up.”
- “It’s tough to live when you don’t have nothing.”
- “We thought we were set-up alright. . . boom, triple bypass surgery.”
- “I’m so tired. Right now, I’m so wore out.”
- “I want to help people. I don’t want to take anything from anybody . . . I want to work.”
- “I don’t have money to pay them back, but maybe I can give them a ride.”
- “They look at you like. . . well. . .”
- “Before I got up enough nerve to ask you for help. . .”
- “If people would actually listen.”
- “I’ve got two at home I’m trying to take care of.”
- “People have been really nice.”

Interview with Allyssa (female)

- “I was ashamed of who I was, because I was poor.”
- “I have a job!”
- “Because you live there you’re stereotyped.”
- “People look down on people like me.”
- “My mom worked two jobs to support us.”
- “They are no-where near lazy.”
- “Childcare is expensive, you know. What are they supposed to do with their kids? All your money goes to childcare.”
- “If I didn’t have help from my family I couldn’t have worked when (my child) was little.”
- “There’s always a lot of shame.”
- “I love my grandma and my Grandpa, but I was also resentful to the life I had. You know, looking around at everybody else.”
- “No matter what my mom did for me or my grandparents did for me, I always acted as if I was somebody else.”
- “It’s like we don’t matter.”
- “My whole life I have been low.”
- “I hate the hand I was dealt.”
- “I’m so confused with everything.”

The hope of this project is to not only raise awareness, but also to join God in the community by engaging practices to insure that all people have the essentials of life including food, clothing, and shelter while avoiding shame, maintaining dignity. The hope is to embody a missional theology of accompaniment shaped and informed by scripture. If you have ideas or are interested in learning more, please contact me.

Pastor Joe

APPENDIX J: INTERVENTION #2 SERMON

A few years ago, on a Wednesday night at youth group, I asked a high school student who had not been to church for a few months how she was doing and she responded, “It’s been a long winter.” When I asked her why she said, “Dad hasn’t been working and we don’t have enough food in the house.” This came as a surprise to me. When I talked to a few other congregational leaders, they too were surprised. As I looked closer at our community, I realized this was not an isolated incident and has led me to more conversations with youth, congregational leaders, and community leaders. Through these conversations I have recognized a problem does exist and remains relatively unrecognized. I’ve spent the last 3 years digging deeper & discerning this issue of poverty in small-town rural America.

My research & thesis is named, *Invisible Poverty*, acknowledging that poverty can look different in small-towns then it does in more urban areas.

This is how the research is designed. . . (research is explained)

Is there an issue with poverty/hunger in Hill Town, specifically with kids? Here are some of the statistics. In North Dakota, 55,710 people are struggling with hunger - and of them 16,440 are children. That means 1 in 11 children in North Dakota struggles with hunger. In this county 460 people are food insecure. Food insecurity is defined as “Unable to consistently access or afford adequate food.” This year in Hill Town School, 32% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. This is up from 24% last year. The problem of hunger is not just for someone else somewhere else. Hunger is a reality in our own community.

A year ago, we participated in a congregational ministry review. As a part of the ministry review we gathered community leaders. These leaders named struggles with the socio-economic challenges facing kids and their families. They named that the socio-economic divide in Hill Town is “camouflaged” and not readily seen or experienced.

From my initial survey of this congregation, almost 25% of those surveyed are experiencing or have experienced poverty. From our own experience, as a church we have recognized the challenges that exist in providing for a child or children by people initiating conversations and seeking help. As part of my research I conducted 4 in depth interviews with people who have experienced poverty with at least one child in the household. The first 4 people I asked said “yes”.

Here is some quotes from those interviews. . .

Interview with Lee (female)

- “I didn’t ask to be low-income.”

- “When people found out we lived in low income housing, there was a look. I hated that look. I didn’t want my kids to see that look.”
- “I’ve never not worked full time.”
- “It was shaming. It was so much shame.”
- “My kid. . . he shouldn’t have had to worry.”
- “No kid should have to fear if they will eat or not.”
- “There are so many people with huge hearts. . . but it’s those few that are hurtful.”
- “I thought I would die young and my boys would be left without a mom. And sure enough, I got diagnosed with my cancer.”
- “People think help is a one-time thing. . . but it doesn’t solve the problem.”
- “People I didn’t even know showed up and helped me.”
- “We were poor in materials but we were rich in community.”
- “Hill Town has amazing people!”

Interview with Jean (female)

- “My parents never had money but worked hard.”
- “I went to school at night. I worked during the day.”
- “I didn’t understand how to be a single poor mom.”
- “You don’t have to feel shame because you don’t have money.”
- “When we first moved here (to Hill Town) we were outsiders. And there was a lot of loneliness.”
- “When I came back, it was so interesting because all these people now suddenly expressed care.”
- “Some of these choices are truly life and death.”
- “I couldn’t afford a babysitter.”
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- “I could feel myself disappearing.”
- “In Hill Town, you don’t see the poverty.”
- “I always had faith. Faith in God. Faith in myself. Faith in my child.”
- “It is truly devastating and they are suffering in silence.”
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Interview with Randy (male)

- “I always feel sick, confused and hurt.”
- “I don’t know if I am cursed or what.”
- “What do you do? Go live in your vehicle? We did that for 3 months out in the parking lot at Walmart and Lowes Hardware.”
- “I just can’t give up.”
- “It’s tough to live when you don’t have nothing.”
- “We thought we were set-up alright. . . boom, triple bypass surgery.”

- “I’m so tired. Right now, I’m so wore out.”
- “I want to help people. I don’t want to take anything from anybody. . . I want to work.”
- “I don’t have money to pay them back, but maybe I can give them a ride.”
- “They look at you like. . . well. . .”
- “Before I got up enough nerve to ask you for help. . .”
- “If people would actually listen.”
- “I’ve got two at home I’m trying to take care of.”
- “People have been really nice.”

Interview with Allyssa (female)

- “I was ashamed of who I was, because I was poor.”
- “I have a job!”
- “Because you live there you’re stereotyped.”
- “People look down on people like me.”
- “My mom worked two jobs to support us.”
- “They are no-where near lazy.”
- “Childcare is expensive, you know. What are they supposed to do with their kids? All your money goes to childcare.”
- “If I didn’t have help from my family I couldn’t have worked when (my child) was little.”
- “There’s always a lot of shame.”
- “I love my grandma and my Grandpa, but I was also resentful to the life I had. You know, looking around at everybody else.”
- “No matter what my mom did for me or my grandparents did for me, I always acted as if I was somebody else.”
- “It’s like we don’t matter.”
- “My whole life I have been low.”
- “I hate the hand I was dealt.”
- “I’m so confused with everything.”

From the interviews conducted, there were some consistencies in responses. Some of the common themes included stereotypes/perceptions/assumptions/misunderstanding.

- Men
- Addiction
- Unclean/dirty
- Not working or don’t want to work
- Lazy
- Age

Based on research by Dennis Culhane at the University of Pennsylvania, the year in an American’s life when he or she is most likely to be homeless is age zero to one.

Statistics are helpful, but this isn't about numbers. . . it's about kids. Other consistencies included; good people in this community, stories about helpful individuals, stories about church, and stories about local businesses.

Do you have an issue with poverty, food insecurity, and homelessness? We can definitively say, "YES".

What can be done? What is God already doing and how are we participating? From the survey, almost 20% of the people were not able to name three things that are already happening in this community. Here are some things mentioned;

- Food Pantry (quote: people are very aware that we have a food pantry, people are not aware of the need.)
- Backpack Program
- Community Cares
- Churches
- Community Lutheran
 - Food distribution
 - 5,000 meals served (Wednesdays)
 - WELCA
 - Numerous groups they donate to
 - Pastor's discretionary fund
 - Quilts
- Food's Resource Bank
- Youth
 - Missions Trips
 - Service Projects
- Parish Nursing
- Health Ministry Team
- Individuals
- Veterans Services
- Public Health
- Social Services
- Local Businesses
- Local Law enforcement
- Local Schools
- Shelters
- Sr. Center & Meals on Wheels

What else can we do? I'm going to challenge us to look deeper, because what's been overlooked is kids! When people were asked in the survey about causes of poverty, several stereotypes surfaced including laziness or not wanting to work. While the research shows laziness is not a major contributing factor to poverty, even if it was, it's not the kid's fault. Children shouldn't be punished for what adults have done. Let's look deeper at our own understanding of poverty. Let's also look deeper into faith. What is God's preferred & promised future?

- Matt. 25
 - We need to feed the hungry!
- Romans 3
 - There is no distinction!
 - There is no shame!
 - All four people interviewed named the shame they have experienced. When I asked the high school girl why she didn't ask for help she simply responded, "ashamed."
- John 6

The bread of life!

This is about more than food.

It's about hope.

It's about relationship.

It's about life.

It's about the life we have in Christ.

It's about faith.

It's about Christian Outreach.

It's about God's mission & how do we participate in it.

We have a hungry world, hungry for more than food. If you give a man a fish, you feed him for day. If you teach a man to fish, he is fed for a lifetime. The hope here is not to give a meal (although that's part of it). The hope here is not even for US to teach THEM. The hope here is about learning from each other. The hope is to be in relationship with each other. The hope is about walking together. So that it's not US and THEM, but rather it's about all of us being in relationship with each other. Being in relationship with God. Helping each other experience the love of God. Jesus says, "I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me will never go hungry." You see, it's not just about receiving a meal, it's about receiving the bread of life.

Today's bible text is the Feeding of the 5000. There are two things I want to point out: First, in verse 16, Jesus says, "YOU give them something to eat". God has provided us with everything we need to provide for each other. God has fed us to feed a hungry world. Secondly, this question, "is there enough?" We only have five loaves and two fish, do we have enough? Not only is there enough, but there is leftovers. God provides, not just enough, God provides an ABUNDANCE! Twelve baskets full.

For us, is there enough? Not only is there enough, there is an abundance!

I know we have a need in this community. I also know we have people who care. So the question is. . . how do we do it?

The hope of this project is three-fold

1. Raise Awareness

Local challenges & needs

Aware of what is already being done

2. Attitudes

If you are struggling with Poverty

To have an attitude of collaboration
 Let's partner
 Let's learn from each other
 Let's be in relationship
 If you are NOT struggling with Poverty
 To have an attitude compassion
 Let's listen to each other
 Not with pity or judgement
 But with love & sincere care.

3. Action

Explore new possibilities (Feed the hungry)
 Let's envision the possibilities of what God is calling us into
 Maybe that includes:
 Summer Meals
 Collaborate & Partner

As a church, we have done a lot of work exploring and discerning, what is God's mission in & through Community Lutheran and how do we participate in it? At our annual meeting in January we adopted the mission statement; Helping people experience the love of God.

Now, let's participate in that mission. Let's get involved and support the things that are already happening. Let's explore what else God is calling us into. And may a student in Hill Town never again have to say, "We didn't have enough food."

To God be the glory, amen.

Invisible Poverty Bible Study



Matthew 25:35-40 I Was Hungry

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink?’

As people of faith we are called to feed the hungry, to provide drink, to welcome the stranger, to clothe the naked, to care for the sick, and to visit the imprisoned. According to the Facts about Hunger and Poverty in America: children and adults face poverty and hunger in every county across America. In the United States, forty million people struggle with hunger including more than twelve million children.

- When was there a time you saw someone hungry?
- What did you do?
- What does God call us to do?

Romans 3:21-23 Without Distinction

But now, irrespective of law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

We often refer to Matthew 25 by quoting verse 40, “just as you did it to one of the *least of these* who are members of my family, you did it to me.” A question raised from this text is; who are the *least of these*? According

to Paul in his letter to the Romans, we have *all* fallen short of the glory of God and we are *all* the least of these. No distinction is made. Galatians 3:26-29 teaches that in Christ Jesus we are *all* children of God through faith. We have been clothed with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of us are one in Christ Jesus. As we discern the church's role in engaging issues of hunger and poverty, one of the hopes is to overcome a perception of "we" have something to give "you". Instead, it is about being in relationship and walking together without distinction.

- When have you felt like the *least of these*?
- What does these bible verses teach us about discrimination?
- Tell about a time you have witnessed discrimination.
- What did you do? What did you think?
- What can we do to dismantle discrimination?

John 6:32-35 Bread of Life

Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

We have people who are hungry in our community. The first task is to feed them. In doing so, we share more than a meal. We are sharing life. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. In Christ, we receive much more than a meal. In Christ, we receive hope, peace, compassion, grace, mercy, forgiveness, love, comfort, strength, life, and salvation.

- Is there a difference between feeding someone a meal and feeding them the bread of life?
- What does helping people in poverty have to do with Christian outreach or ministry?
- How can we share Jesus Christ the bread of life?
- What other bible stories include food, hunger, or poverty?

Luke 24:30-42 Road to Emmaus

When Jesus was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?"

The Road to Emmaus is a powerful image of food and faith. This Emmaus story takes place after the resurrection and before the ascension. The disciples walked with their faces downcast. Jesus himself came up and walked with them but they did not recognize him. When they reached the village Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him. It was in the breaking of the bread that Christ was revealed. In facing the problems with poverty in a small-town, it is easy to become discouraged. It is easy to walk with our faces downcast. It is easy to lose hope. The road to Emmaus reminds us that we walk this road together, with Jesus in our presence. Although we do not always recognize the Holy Spirit being at work, God is with us on the road. How has God been revealed in your life?

- When was your first communion? Was it meaningful?
- Is there a time you received communion that was especially meaningful?
- What makes your heart burn with concern?
- What makes your heart burn with joy?

APPENDIX L: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

The four interventions used in this research included (1) a newsletter article, (2) a sermon, (3) Bible study, and (4) a service project. Each intervention was followed up with a focus group. An informed consent form was used for the focus groups (see appendix C). I used the research invitation, “Because I value your experience and your voice, and because I would like to be able to best serve and help people in this community, I would like to have your consent to use this conversation in my research.” To insure the subject understood what he/she had been asked to do I asked clarifying questions: Do you have any questions? Do you have any concerns? I read both verbal and nonverbal indicators of understanding and cooperation. Two of the focus groups were comprised of five willing participants selected by purposive/informed sampling (newsletter and Bible study interventions), one focus group was comprised on six participants (sermon intervention), and the fourth focus group had four participants (service project intervention).

Focus Group Questions:

- What are your impressions? What struck you as memorable?
- How does this event shape your understanding of God and/or church?
- How does this event shape your idea of our calling or our mission statement?
- Is there anything you'd like to add to the conversation?
- We have people who need help and people who want to help and how do we do it?

- How do we come up with solutions together?

APPENDIX M: ADVERTISEMENTS

Forum Seeks Solutions to Hunger, Food Insecurity



Pastor Joe Johnson

Joe Johnson, pastor at Community Lutheran Church in Hill Town, discusses the impacts of hunger and food insecurity during a public forum.



Photo, left, keeps a close eye on Derrin ... jumped in the Hillsboro municipal pool ... parents last summer.

Leaders to debate poor pool

City lays out options to replace 63-year-old pool in Woodland Park

HILLSBORO, N.D. — Hillsboro will kick off talks tonight discussing whether the city will build a new indoor pool or repair the outdoor pool in Woodland Park.



City Commissioner Jerry Sanchez has led at public meetings the idea of replacing Woodland Park pool with an indoor facility. Sanchez said Monday that he is looking at financing options and the location for a new pool as well as a timeline for the project. Sanchez said he is hearing from numerous people that going to Mayville to swim or having birthday parties in Cassidon at the pool there "sounds good." Sanchez said it's a lot of dollars Hillsboro is missing simply because we don't have an attraction for people to see.

Continued on page 5

Donations curbing kids' overdue lunch

HILLSBORO — Donations from parents and donors are helping to curb the percentage of overdue lunch fees at the Hillsboro School District by nearly 50 percent in the past month.

Hillsboro Public Schools Superintendent ... said the district saw its unpaid lunch fees drop from \$14,500 to \$12,700, a reduction of 12.4 percent in a four-month span. The influx of \$1,700 in revenue was beyond ...

STAMPING OUT HUNGER

In Hill Town

Community pastor raising awareness about invisible poverty affecting local youth

36% of children surveyed in the region were food insecure

7% of children skipped meals regularly

62% of households reported having to choose between food and medicine

86% of participants reported having a chronic disease

27% of adults reported not eating for a whole day

Source: Great Plains Food Bank

"This all started with a student saying, 'We didn't have enough food in the house.' My hope is that a student in Hillsboro never has to say that again." — Pastor Joe Johnson

In Hill Town

Community pastor raising awareness about invisible poverty affecting local youth

The memory of the conversation three or four years ago still weighs on Joe Johnson. The pastor at Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Hillsboro hadn't crossed paths with one of his parishioners in months when he saw her and asked how she was doing. Winter had been hard on the teenage girl and her family. Her father hadn't been working and there wasn't enough food in the home. "I said, 'Why didn't you come to me and say something? I would've helped,'" Johnson recalls telling the teen. "She hung her head and said, 'Ashamed.' That really opened my eyes. But after looking closer and having conversations with a number of people, I realized this wasn't an isolated incident in Hillsboro." Johnson has spent the past few months compiling research and conducting interviews with local families to lift the veil on invisible poverty in the community.

HUNGER (Continued on page 10)

**WELCA Spring Cluster Gathering
Saturday, April 27, 2019
Community Lutheran Church
Hill Town**



Invisible Poverty

**Hunger in a Small-town and Rural
Community**

Presented by Pastor Joe Johnson

RSVP by Monday, April 15, 2019



Hunger in Community County

A Community Conversation



Thursday, September 19th

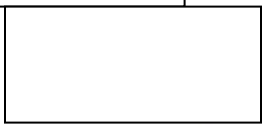
University Room 6:30-8:00 p.m.

Hosted by **Pastor Joe Johnson & Taylor Syvertson**

Together with local leaders discussing the status of hunger in Traill county communities.

Questions?
Call or text
Pastor Joe Johnson
Community Lutheran Church

Together we can end hunger.



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