

**Working Draft:
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**Comprehensive Community Building in
Distressed Neighborhoods:
Catholic Colleges and Universities as Partners**

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I. Introduction

A. Purpose of the Talk

In this talk I would like to share with the people of the Walsh University Community and its partners from within the greater community of Canton some of the experiences that we have had in the Center for Leadership in Community at the University of Dayton. We have been working at connecting the University of Dayton with the many of the neighborhoods of the City of Dayton for more than twelve years. In this talk, I will share some of the challenges of working with the “wicked problems” of distressed neighborhoods; share with you an approach to addressing these problems that we call community building; and then give you some case studies of how we have applied the community building approach.

B. Becoming Partners with Distressed Neighborhoods

One of the main efforts of the Center for Leadership in Community is to develop sustainable partnerships with distressed neighborhoods, i.e. neighborhoods characterized by high levels of poverty, i.e., neighborhoods with poverty rates over 30%. What does it mean for a university to be a partner with a distressed neighborhood? In working with distressed neighborhoods, we see lots

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of problems – children being abused and neglected, parents not having the opportunity to work in order to support their families, the lack of suitable housing, clothing, and food, public schools unresponsive to the learning needs of the children, and unresponsive public services. How does a university respond to these problems?

A long-term partnership between the university and a neighborhood must be a win-win situation for both the university and the neighborhood. The university's core business is learning; it is not a social service agency. If the partnership can not provide a fruitful learning environment for the university then the university will find it difficult to sustain its investment in the partnership². The university must realize that people in neighborhoods, especially their leaders, have much to teach our faculty and students. Service in neighborhoods can be a great basis for experiential learning. To benefit from community-based learning, our faculty must have the ability to place students in neighborhood situations, but also have the ability to assist students in doing the necessary reflection needed to articulate and integrate the knowledge that they have acquired through their experience. On the other hand, the neighborhood needs to see that it is reaping some benefit for the neighborhood so that its leaders will invest substantial time in the partnership. Leaders of neighborhoods will collaborate in the learning if they can see that the learning experience is helping the neighborhood realize something important for their neighborhood agenda.

² This is especially true for private universities.

We have also found that one of the most important attitudes that we must bring to forming partnerships is a learning orientation. To be a learner means that we have to hold our disciplinary expertise lightly. As faculty members who have immersed ourselves in our discipline for many years we are use to being experts. Even in the classroom we usually have some type of answers ready for the questions that we raise with our students. When we see ourselves as experts, we almost always have a ready response to any question or challenging situation. In working with distressed neighborhoods we have found that our disciplinary expertise will eventually be helpful in asking good questions.

What is most needed from faculty and students is our willingness to become a good conversation partner with people from the neighborhood. Good conversation partners realize that there are multiple perspectives on the reality of the neighborhood and that the neighborhood partners have valuable insights and skills that they bring to the partnership. No one single voice or viewpoint can capture the true appreciation of a neighborhood; true appreciation emerges through dialogue that embraces diverse perspectives and voices of the neighborhood.

From the very beginning it is important that we learn how to listen to the people in the neighborhood. We need to appreciate their experience of the neighborhood with both its frustrations and its gifts. This experience is usually embedded in stories and narratives people tell about their neighborhood and how it has changed overtime. There are stories of tragedy– stories of children being lost through violence and drug use and stories about people losing their house

through predatory lending. There also are stories of joy and gifts – stories of young people succeeding in school and stories of neighborhood triumph in getting a park reopened by the City. These stories help us understand the problems and frustrations of the neighborhoods as well as the gifts of people and groups within the neighborhood. To be a good partner with the neighborhood it is important to appreciate the stories of the neighborhood.

Once we begin to appreciate the stories of the neighborhood, we can enter into conversations of change and transformation of the neighborhood. In these conversations of change and transformation, the partners explore questions like:

- What kind of vision for the future would the neighborhood like to create for itself?
- What assets inside the neighborhood and outside the neighborhood can be used to realize this vision?
- What barriers are there to realizing this vision? and
- How can we develop projects that will help us realize our vision – projects which mobilize assets to overcome barriers?

A good partnership requires the university team to initially facilitate a series of productive conversations about the future of the neighborhood. Over time the university teams can shift the responsibility for facilitating these conversations to the neighborhood leaders with the university team being one of the conversation partners.

C. The Importance of Public Language

Before I address the elements of a partnership with distressed neighborhoods I want to talk about the need for and the importance of a public language. Walsh College's identity and mission is as a Catholic university. We are gathered here today to explore how that identity and mission can be a resource for your partnerships with the greater Canton community in advancing justice for all people and groups in our urban community. Here is a critical question for us in Catholic colleges and universities: "How do we engage conversation aimed at advancing justice in an urban community when some, often many people, don't share our religious convictions and/or are not comfortable using religious language in talking about public policy issues like poverty reduction, job training, public school reform, etc?"

Based on many years of experience in engaging all sectors of our community in conversations on advancing justice in our city, I am convinced that we need to develop a shared public language. In this talk, I will develop the language of community building as the shared public language that we have used for over 12 years in the Center for Leadership in Community. I hope to show you that public language of community building is one that can be used both for conversations within the University community and conversations out in the neighborhoods and public forums of the community. To be effective in bridging the many stakeholders in an urban community this public language must have several characteristics. First, it must be sufficiently rich to sustain the interdisciplinary dialogue among the University partners; it must be a language

that can bridge the many disciplines of the University needed to address advancing justice in the urban community. Second, it must be easily grasped by community partners; neighborhood partners and public citizens must find this language to have a common sense feel to it and one they can use to articulate their experience of their neighborhoods and their larger community. Third, for a Catholic university, this public language must lend itself to a critical and constructive dialogue with the Catholic intellectual tradition and especially the Catholic social tradition. In Appendix A, I give a preliminary description of how the language of community building can fruitfully enter into a conversation with the Catholic Social Tradition. At the University of Dayton we have found that the public language of community building allows us to have fruitful interdisciplinary conversation on urban justice, it allow us to enter into conversation with neighbors, business people, and public officials, and it allows us to bring the best insights of our Catholic social tradition into these conversations.

II. The Challenge of Distressed Neighborhoods

If we have been involved in service or service learning projects in our center city neighborhoods we have encountered people coming from distressed neighborhoods. In this part of the talk I would like to review the set of interrelated problems that reside in distressed neighborhoods, what I like to call the “wicked problem of the distressed neighborhoods” and then investigate the root causes of this wicked problem.

A. The Wicked Problem of Distressed Neighborhoods

To understand the power of community building it is important to understand distressed neighborhoods. To accomplish this I would like to give a brief tour of distressed neighborhoods or what one mother called “tough neighborhoods” – neighborhoods where it is very tough to raise children. When driving into distressed neighborhoods we see many signs of urban decay – abandoned and boarded up houses, abandon store fronts, and vacant lots strewn with trash. You might observe young people loitering on street corners while school is in session. As a visitor from the outside there is a sense that these communities are isolated from the main stream of American life.

Distressed urban neighborhoods have multiple interrelated problems. Over the last fifty years many inner city neighborhoods have experienced significant decay; there is often an experience of fear and despair. There are high rates of poverty and unemployment, many female headed households, and high rates of crime. Distressed neighborhoods are dangerous for children. In these neighborhoods there are higher rates of grade failure, dropping out of school,

teenage violence, and child abuse and neglect. Distressed neighborhoods are also dangerous for families. In these neighborhoods there is a higher occurrence of fathers absent from families, parents lack the skills for employment, and there is high incident of adult alcohol and drug addiction. Families often lack the ties of extended families and friends and therefore lack people who can relate them to the world of work. Some of the problems are illustrated in Table 1 (c.f. next page)

The distress of these neighborhoods is about more than poverty or any single problem; it is about the complexity of these problems. The problems of distressed communities are what I like to call “wicked problems” because they are complex and interdependent with one another. These “wicked problems” are embedded in the economic and social structures of the neighborhood and the community. It is very difficult for a neighborhood by itself to have the capacity to address these problems. The complexity of the problems and lack of collective efficacy in addressing these problems leads to the worsening of the problems as well as growing hopelessness.

To address these “wicked problems” requires the marshalling of resources from all segments of the community. The long term addressing of these problems requires engaging all segments of the community in a constructive conversation of change that gradually defines these problems in all their complexity and interdependence, creates develop a vision of the future which excites the neighborhood and the larger community, and develops a realistic long term action plan to realize this vision. Re the problems in all their complexity

and then and the collapse of the neighborhood's and the larger community's ability to cope with this complex set of problems.

Table 1: Multiple Problems of Distressed Neighborhoods³

Job Readiness and Job Availability

- In inner city high schools the dropout rate ranges from 50% to 80%
- Youth living in high poverty neighborhoods are 26 times more likely to drop out of school than youth living in affluent neighborhoods
- One study found that 25% of high school graduates of inner city high schools could read at no more than sixth-grade level
- In center city neighborhoods 30% to 40% of the adult men are not employed

Crime Violence, Gangs and Drugs

- Youth living in high poverty neighborhoods are 18 times more likely to be killed by gun fire than youth living in affluent neighborhoods
- In a survey of first and second graders in Washington, D.C., 31 % had witnessed shootings and 39% has seen dead bodies
- In major cities more than 50% of the arrestees for violent crimes tested positive for at least one illegal drug

Poverty, Family Dissolution, and Welfare Dependency

- Youth living in high poverty neighborhoods are 60 times more likely to suffer reportable abuse or neglect and 46 times more likely to be placed in foster care than youth living in affluent neighborhoods
- Distressed neighborhoods have a high and growing percentage of single female head of household; more than half of these households live in poverty

Physical Blight and Inadequate Housing

- High percentage of vacant housing
- Many homeless families come from distressed neighborhoods

³ Some examples are taken from *Rebuilding Inner-City Communities*, pp 12-13.

B. The Root Causes of the Wicked Problem

A root cause of this inability to address the complex set of problems in the neighborhood is the loss of social capital in neighborhoods. Social capital⁴ refers to resources embedded in social relations among persons, groups, and organizations in a neighborhood that facilitate cooperation and collaboration. Social capital enables a neighborhood to mobilize other forms of capital. For example, a relationship (social capital) between a community center and a service club on a University campus allows educated students (human capital) to benefit children if they can provide an opportunity for them to interact around reading (social capital). Low cost loans (financial capital) can be made available to low income families through the collaboration (social capital) of a neighborhood organization, local banks, and sponsoring institutions.

Social capital in a neighborhood is manifested in three major ways: information sharing, trust, and cultural norms and beliefs that support and maintain social order. Social relations provide information, for example, when people are looking for a job they are able to consult with friends, relatives, or neighborhoods that have been successful in finding a job. Good neighborhoods are built on trust, i.e. a norm of generalized reciprocity within the community. I am willing to volunteer to be part of a neighborhood watch program because I know others in the neighborhood will also respond to call for service when a request is made, e.g. when they are asked to be part of an alley clean up on a spring weekend. The third manifestation of social capital is cultural in nature

⁴ The concept of social capital is developed by Putnam and Payne and Williams. We will see later that strong social capital by itself will not ensure a good neighborhood. It has to be social capital that reinforces the human good for the people in the neighborhood.

and it consists of shared norms and expectations, shared beliefs, and shared stories. This cultural dimension is passed on in families, schools, churches, and other social settings. The cultural dimension includes such social expectations as keeping one's house painted and yard well kept, delaying childbearing until finishing high school and getting married, and that parents are expected to invest in their children's education. Where there is a strong cultural dimension to social capital in a neighborhood then actions which are valued culturally are reinforced by social support, honors, and rewards where as failure to comply with the cultural norms is sanctioned by punishment or loss of status. Table No. 2 (c.f. next page) illustrates how a social capital deficit exacerbates the complex set of problems of distressed neighborhoods shown in Table No. 1.

The social capital within the social networks of the neighborhood (bonding social capital) supports people from within the neighborhood working together to address its problems and opportunities using the assets and resources from within the community. Yet bonding social capital by itself is not sufficient to address the problems of distressed neighborhoods. Neighborhoods must develop bridging or linking social capital which connects the neighborhood to opportunities, organizations, and services in the larger community. For example, a Neighborhood Development Corporation may want to refurbish a house in its neighborhood but it lacks both financial capital (the money) and human capital (the know-how) to undertake this enterprise. If the Neighborhood Development Corporation can form a coalition with an adjacent hospital system that has interest in revitalizing the neighborhood and a City-wide Development Corporation that is charged with funneling Federal funds to housing renovation,

then it may have a real opportunity to pull off the housing renovation project.

The rebuilding of neighborhoods requires both the rebuilding of bonding social capital and bridging or linking social capital.

Table No. 2: Deficits in Social Capital Exacerbate Problems⁵

Educational Achievement

- Absence of parental support decreases the likelihood of academic achievement.
- A high neighborhood dropout rate reduces the stigma attached to dropping out of high school.
- Absence of educated gainfully employed adults in the neighborhood obscures the rewards of graduation.

Crime

- Weak social capital account for a greater proportion of the crime rates in neighborhoods than poverty alone.
- The breakdown of social networks forces parents to rely on themselves to monitor and control behavior of their children.
- Distrust and fear discourage residents from venturing outside of their homes, limiting participation in community activities and interpersonal relationships and leaving streets deserted and dangerous.

Unemployment

- Many inner-city youth are disconnected from successful, legally employed individuals, hence, they fail to see the rewards for delaying childbearing, staying in school, and avoiding criminal involvement.
- Successful job seekers are often relying on personal networks to learn of openings and to obtain recommendations from someone the employer trusts. Being disconnected from employed persons makes it difficult for youth and adults from distressed neighborhoods to network for finding jobs.

Physical Blight

- When a household does not keep up its housing it lowers the standard for the rest of the households in the neighborhoods.
- The gang graffiti that remains untreated increases the rundown sense of the community.

⁵ Some examples are taken from *Rebuilding Inner-City Communities*, p 15.

Let me summarize what we have said about distressed neighborhoods:

- Distressed neighborhoods have multiple interacting problems
- A root cause of these problems is a serious decline of social capital resulting in the inability of the people in the neighborhood to cope with this complex set of problems.

Distressed neighborhoods have lost a sense of community and a connection to the larger community. To address justice in distressed neighborhoods we must partner with these neighborhoods in rebuilding community and help to restore connections to the larger urban community.

III. Community Building in Distressed Neighborhoods

How can the analysis of the previous section help us think how distressed neighborhoods might be transformed into communities that are much more supportive of children and families?

A. Community Building: A Process with a Purpose

For the Center for Leadership in Community at the University of Dayton, the community building is a **process** with a **purpose**. The process of dimension of community building in a neighborhood is the continuous self-renewing efforts undertaken by a community building team to engage in problem solving, collective action, and neighborhood enrichment. The community building team includes a team of residents, learners from the University, and other professionals from outside of the neighborhood who can make a contribution to the neighborhood. In this process, dimension of community building, we are continually endeavoring to build the capacity of the neighborhood to engage in conversations of change and transformation – conversations about creating a shared future for the neighborhood and then mobilizing the resources that are needed to realize this future.

The purpose, dimension of community building, we try to capture in a simple question: “What will it take in this neighborhood for children and youth to succeed and families to thrive? To create such a neighborhood the community building team works to rebuild the social capital of the neighborhood by strengthening current neighborhood assets, relationships, and institutions and by

creating new assets, relationships, and institutions that will support children and families. The community building team works to rebuild the culture of the neighborhood so that it sets new norms and standards for the neighborhood that will contribute to the youth succeeding and families flourishing. This cultural change means that people in the neighborhood, especially its leaders, have to replace beliefs and stories of hopelessness and apathy with beliefs and stories of hope and belief that they can bring about change.

B. The Purpose of Community Building

As I indicated above, the Center for Leadership in Community has focused on the question “How do we go about building neighborhoods where children succeed and families thrive?” The best thinking of our religious traditions and much social science tells us that “Children do well when their families do well, and families do better when living in supportive neighborhoods. Just as children need strong families to thrive, families need thriving communities to fulfill their potential. Even the most resilient families find it difficult to succeed, much less pass on a legacy of hope to their children,

in communities eroded by a lack of investment and opportunity.” We believe it is important to view a neighborhood as a social ecology in which children flourish because they are supported by strong and stable families and families in turn are reinforced by a supportive and engaged

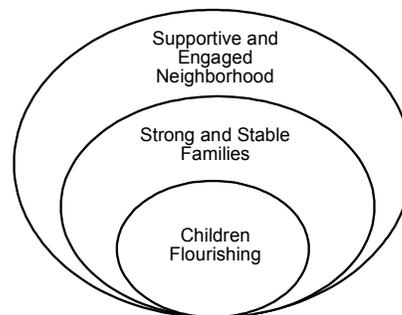


Figure 1: The Social Ecology of a Supportive and Engaged Neighborhood

neighborhood (c.f. Figure 1). There is hope for children in distressed neighborhoods and there is hope for justice if we can find ways to transform these distressed neighborhoods into neighborhoods where families thrive and children and youth flourish. Let's explore some dimensions of the Social Ecology of Supportive and Engaged Neighborhoods by exploring some questions.

1. What do children need from families? There are many studies that indicate that children need supportive, consistent, and authoritative relationships with their parents and siblings. Children, as human beings, have an inborn need to make connections, i.e., “a close attachment to other people beginning with our mothers, fathers, and extended families, and then moving out to the broader community.”⁶ Also there is a good body of evidence to suggest, that children are born with a built-in capacity and drive to search for meaning – a drive for purpose and reflect on life's ultimate ends.⁷

There seems to be a good consensus that children need the following from their families⁸:

- **Family Support:** Parents and/or primary caregivers provide the child with high levels of consistent and predictable love, physical care, and positive attention in ways that are responsive to the child's individuality.

⁶ Authoritative Communities p 9

⁷ Ibid

⁸ These descriptors are based on the 40 Development Assets of the Search Institute at www.serach-institute.org. I have adapted the external assets to fit the answer to the questions of this section. I have used descriptors for Young Children 3-5 years old. The Search Institute adjusts these descriptors for Middle Childhood 6-11 years old and for Adolescents 12-18 years old.

- **Positive Family Communication:** Parents and/or primary caregivers express themselves positively and respectfully, engaging young children in conversations that invite their input.
- **Parent Involvement in Child Care and Education:** Parents, caregivers, and teachers together create a consistent and supportive approach to fostering the child's successful growth.
- **Service to Others:** The child has opportunities to perform simple but meaningful and caring actions for others.
- **Safety:** Parents and caregivers take action to ensure children's health and safety.
- **Family Boundaries:** The family provides consistent supervision for the child and maintains reasonable guidelines for behavior that the child can understand and achieve.
- **Adults as Role Models:** Parents and other adults within the extended family model self-control, social skills, engagement in learning, and healthy lifestyles.
- **Positive Peer Relationships:** Parents and caregivers seek to provide opportunities for the child to interact positively with other children.
- **Positive Expectations:** Parent(s) and caregivers encourage and support the child in behaving appropriately, undertaking challenging tasks, and performing activities to the best of her or his abilities.

- **Play and Creative Activities:** The child has daily opportunities to play in ways that allow self-expression, physical activity, and interaction with others.
- **Religious Community:** Parents enable children to participate in age-appropriate religious activities and caring relationships that nurture her or his spiritual development.
- **Time at Home:** The child spends most of her or his time at home participating in family activities and playing constructively, with parents guiding TV and electronic game use.

These characteristics of families that support children can be used in developing some characteristics of strong and stable families.

2. What Do Children Need From the Neighborhood and the Larger Community?

Again we address this question with the basic premise that children seek connection, support, and direction not only in the family but in the larger neighborhood and community. There is a good deal of consensus around the characteristics of the neighborhood as being important for children⁹:

- **Other Adult Relationships:** With the family's support, the child experiences consistent, caring relationships with adults outside the family.
- **Caring Neighborhood:** The child's network of relationships includes neighbors who provide emotional support and a sense of belonging.

⁹ These descriptors are also based on the 40 Development Assets of the Search Institute at www.serach-institute.org.

- **Caring Climate in Child Care and Educational Settings:** Caregivers and teachers create environments that are nurturing, accepting, encouraging, and secure.
- **Community Cherishes and Values Young Children:** Children are welcomed and included throughout neighborhood and community life.
- **Children Seen as Resources:** The community demonstrates that children are valuable resources by investing in a child-rearing system family support and high-quality activities and resources to meet children's physical, social, and emotional needs.
- **Service to Others:** The child has opportunities to perform simple but meaningful and caring actions for others.
- **Safety:** Teachers, neighbors, and the community take action to ensure children's health and safety.
- **Boundaries in Child Care and Educational Settings:** Caregivers and educators use positive approaches to discipline and natural consequences to encourage self-regulation and acceptable behaviors.
- **Neighborhood Boundaries:** Neighbors encourage the child in positive, acceptable behavior, as well as intervene in negative behavior, in a supportive, non-threatening way.
- **Adult Role Models:** Adults in the neighborhood model self-control, social skills, engagement in learning, and healthy lifestyles.

- **Play and Creative Activities:** The child has daily opportunities to play in ways that allow self-expression, physical activity, and interaction with others.
- **Out-of-Home and Community Programs:** The child experiences well-designed programs led by competent, caring adults in well-maintained settings.
- **Religious Community:** The child participates in age-appropriate religious activities and caring relationships that nurture her or his spiritual development.

These characteristics can be used to define what a neighborhood and the larger community can contribute to the flourishing of children.

3. *What Do Families Need from Neighborhoods and Communities?* A number of national and regional Foundations have been exploring how neighborhoods and communities can support families. One outstanding example is the Annie E. Casey Foundation which has identified three critical connections:

- **Economic:** Families must have an opportunity to work, earn a decent living, and have the opportunity to build family assets. Programs that are aimed at better economic connections include job training, savings, learning how to make wise financial choices, fully utilizing the federal earned income tax credit, and home buying assistance.
- **Social:** Families must have access to networks of supportive relationships that include families, friends, neighbors, community institutions, boys and

girls clubs, church and faith-based organizations, and civic organizations, like neighborhood organizations.

- **Services:** Families must have access to responsive services that are close to home. This includes not only good schools, housing, child care and health care, but also recreational, preventive, and crisis oriented services that are culturally appropriate to the neighborhood.

To address justice in distressed neighborhoods, we need to engage in community building which finds ways to mobilize every part of our community, every agency of county and city government, and the neighborhood schools around the agenda of reconnecting the families of our distressed neighborhoods to all of these important resources.

C. The Process of Community Building

The process dimension of community building starts out as a simple conversation between a team from the University and neighborhood leaders. As the conversations expand and more people are brought into the process it becomes more complicated. I would like to illustrate how this process evolves.

Initiating the Partnership: Those initiating the community building process must engage the neighborhood in ways that build trust and emphasize possibilities and hope. In many cases the people of distressed neighborhoods are dishearten and feel powerless. The prevalence of unemployment, low wages jobs, family distress of all types have reinforced these feelings of powerlessness and the message that it is useless to work at improving the neighborhood. Working to build community requires building trust; the neighborhoods have to believe that

you are there to work for the good of the people and the neighborhood. Students, faculty, and staff of the University come to work primarily on the agenda of the neighborhood and not to promote a specific project or a favorite idea. Working to bring the resources of the University to the neighborhood agenda takes lots of time and patience.

People need to build grounds for hope and new possibilities. The Center has focused on asset-based neighborhood development that looks at the gifts and talents of persons and a neighborhood sees how these assets can be used to help the neighborhood build the capability to work toward its vision. (Kretzmann and McKnight) One of the most important ways of developing trust within a neighborhood is to help them in mapping and appreciating the assets they have and reflecting with them on how they can be mobilized for a better future.

Developing an Agenda and a Network for Change: Community building requires an agenda for change and networks of relationships to implement change. Neighborhood residents must focus or drive the agenda for change by addressing problems and opportunities to which they give high priority, such as public safety, improving the quality of the schools, dealing with teen violence or trash in the alleys. While working on this agenda, people build relationships of friendship and common interest, developing mutual trust, and sharing information as well as the beliefs and convictions that provide a common ground for change. By acting together in recognizing problems, determining workable solutions, implementing these solutions, and learning how to better the future, the residents are beginning the initial stages of organizing itself as citizens group for neighborhood improvement.

The work of building both an agenda of change and the relationships of trust and collaboration needed to power change is time consuming work. People have multiple obligations with work and family and these often take away from the time needed for relationship building in the neighborhood. Sometimes implementing the change agenda requires so much effort that relationships and developing common ground for change are neglected. Time must be given to keeping relationships strong.

Learning and Organizing: Community building is a developmental journey that requires continual learning and more complex forms of organizing. Community building requires learning on the part of individuals and the neighborhood itself. The problems of distressed neighborhoods are almost always complex and ambiguous. Neighborhood and resource people must be willing to question some of the assumptions that they hold about these problems and how they might be solved. There may be many perspectives on a simple problem like trash in alleys and vacant lots. Some neighbors may believe it is careless renters and school kids and others might believe it is outside dumping. Focused conversations and dialogue on the nature of the problem and its causes often helps build a consensus around an enriched way the neighbors can view the problem and its solution. Building consensus requires learning and often changes how neighbors and their collaborators from the University see the neighborhood. Such change in interpretation is not easy.

Community building often starts with a concerned group of neighbors who through focused conversation work on a limited agenda. They may have limited success with an issue like crime in the neighborhood and the development of a

neighborhood watch program. But they soon realize that they are not able to reduce crime the way they would like unless they can address issues like boarding houses, absentee landlords, unemployment and recreational opportunities for youth. To sustain success in one area requires broadening the agenda, and broadening the agenda requires involving more people and developing an organization that can support more involvement. The problems of a distressed neighborhood are interconnected and must be addressed in a comprehensive way. Over time, community building makes the move from a core group of neighbors engaged with a limited neighborhood agenda to the development of neighborhood based organization that is working on a more comprehensive neighborhood agenda involving a larger portion of the neighborhood and connecting to organizations in the larger community.

Sustaining the Community Building Process: To sustain the community building process over time requires that the neighborhood based organization expand the partnership by developing multiple relationships with other neighborhood based assets and organizations external to the neighborhood. The neighborhood based organization provides an indispensable human and social resource for the neighborhood, such as knowledge of the neighborhood and its problems and the trust and participation of the residents. Yet, neighborhood based organizations often lack financial or other resources needed to implement the agenda. Small projects like cleaning alleys and vacant lots may require collaboration with the city sanitation department and organized neighbors. Larger projects like renovating abandon houses in the neighborhood may require capital from federal housing programs, investments by the city and county

government and key non-profit institutions in the neighborhood as well as supervision of construction and the subsequent financing and sale of the houses.

To sustain this level of partnership requires the building of a coalition type organization with some permanent staff. Building a coalition type organization requires developing a sustainable flow of funding for the staff needed to sustain the community building effort. This has been the biggest challenge for our community building efforts in the neighborhoods of the Dayton community.

IV. The Catholic College and University as a Partner in Community Building

In this section I will outline how the Center for Leadership in Community goes about engaging neighborhoods in Dayton and the larger community in the community building process. First, I outline a basic framework that we use to organize our work; second, I indicate how we initiate the community building process in a neighborhood, and third, I illustrate this process with a few examples.

A. Basic Framework: A Dynamic Agenda and an Inventory of Resources

One of the basic problems in establishing a sustainable partnership with an urban neighborhood is the continuity of the efforts over time. Courses, service learning opportunities, and service research projects are usually organized around semesters, i.e. distinct periods of time in the fall and the winter-spring at our University. Lives of neighborhoods are not organized around these discrete time periods and as such makes it difficult to match the life of the academy with the life of the neighborhood. To engage neighborhoods in a sustainable manner over time, we have to find a way to bridge these two ways of working.

Trust is another problem. When faculty and students go into a neighborhood on a one time experience, it is very difficult for the neighborhood to develop a relationship and hence develop trust in the faculty members and the students. Community building efforts require that persons from the University and the leaders and the people of the neighborhood can relate to one another

over an extended period of time. The Center Staff has developed several strategies to overcome these problems.

The basic framework that the Center staff uses in orchestrating partnerships with neighborhoods is illustrated in Figure

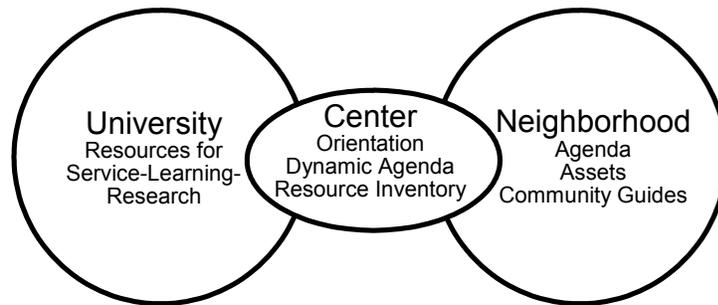


Figure 2: Framework for Neighborhood Intervention

No. 2. The Center Staff provides a bridge between the neighborhood and the University resources that are contained in academic departments, service clubs, residence halls, and fraternities and sororities. Academic departments provide faculty and students who are interested in service-learning and research. Service clubs, residence halls, and fraternities and sororities all provide rich resources of volunteers for community service. What each of these groups lacks is an effective placement for their voluntary service. An organized neighborhood has a strategic agenda that requires help with projects and a leadership team that can act as guides for service learners and researchers as well as volunteers.

The Center Staff provides a bridge between the University resources and the neighborhoods. The Center Staff provides orientation to faculty, students, and volunteers who will work on a neighborhood project so they are able to use the Centers community building approach in their interaction with the neighborhood. The Center Staff also orients neighborhood leaders about what to

expect if they work with a team of faculty and students. Because of their interaction with neighborhood leaders the Center staff also has a sense of the dynamic strategic agenda of the neighborhood. By knowing the strategic agenda of the neighborhood, Center Staff has a good idea of how a neighborhood can be assisted by a team of faculty and student service-learner-researchers in implementing a neighborhood project. A neighborhood project is a set of activities that will contribute to the strategic agenda of the neighborhood and has a well-defined beginning and end. Neighborhood projects come in wide varieties and included, for example, volunteering for after-school program of reading enhancement, the construction of a web page for a neighborhood, performing a neighborhood survey to gauge common neighborhood interest, a land use plan that the neighborhood can present to the City, a marketing study of a neighborhood restaurant or business, etc.

The implementation of these projects needs to be structured so that they last for a semester or perhaps for an academic year. The Center staff works with the neighborhood leaders to develop a good description of the neighborhood project, e.g. what is the purpose of the project, how does the project relate to the strategic agenda of the neighborhood, what does the neighborhood expect from the team, etc. The Center staff then uses its inventory of faculty resources to see if a team can be mobilized to undertake the neighborhood project. The faculty and student team are presented with an opportunity for service-learning-research through implementing a particular neighborhood project and the Center Staff and the neighborhood leadership are able to provide continuity for the

neighborhood by making sure these individual neighborhood projects address the strategic agenda of the neighborhood.

Usually one member of the Center staff is a Coordinator with a specific neighborhood and its leaders. The Neighborhood Coordinator has the task of providing continuity and sustainability with the neighborhood. Since the Neighborhood Coordinator has an on-going relationship with the leaders of the neighborhood there is an excellent opportunity to develop trust between the Center Staff and the leadership team of the neighborhood.

B. Initiating a Partnership with a Neighborhood

How do we initiate a partnership with a neighborhood? How does a neighborhood get sufficiently organized to have a strategic agenda and some neighborhood projects that are amenable to volunteers, to service-learning projects, and service-research projects? As I indicated in the introduction, Dick Ferguson and I got started on our work with neighborhoods through our class entitled *Leadership in Building Community* and we have used this course, which we teach every fall, to initiate our partnerships with particular neighborhoods. This course partners upper level undergraduates and graduate Masters of Public Administration students with leaders of a distressed neighborhood in the City of Dayton. As a major part of this class the students facilitate and support with a public conversation for the neighborhood aimed at developing a strategic agenda, which includes a shared vision of the neighborhood's future, assets of the neighborhood that can be used to realize the shared vision, barriers to be overcome in realizing the vision, and some neighborhood projects that the

neighborhood could undertake to realize the shared vision. In the process of developing this strategic agenda the University-neighborhood team identifies persons in the neighborhood who can provide help to faculty and students in working on neighborhood projects. We call these individuals community guides and they become teachers and mentors in the neighborhoods. *The Leadership in Building Community* class gives the Center Staff the opportunity to work with the neighborhood to create its strategic agenda. Once the neighborhood strategic agenda has been established, the Executive Director of the Center for Leadership in Community appoints a Neighborhood Coordinator for the neighborhood. The neighborhood strategic agenda allows the Neighborhood Coordinator to work with the neighborhood leaders to identify potential neighborhood projects. With an idea of a potential neighborhood project and a good project description, the Neighborhood Coordinator can identify University faculty and staff that might want to organize a service-learning-research experience that would undertake either a part or a whole neighborhood project. The Neighborhood Coordinator acts as broker between the neighborhood leaders and the person responsible for leading the team in the neighborhood project.

C. Some Case Studies at the Neighborhood Level

I would like to illustrate some of the success we have had with this approach to building community in Dayton neighborhoods. Dick Ferguson and I along with several other staff members of the Center have taught the *Leadership in Building Community* course for 12 years and we have interacted with over 10 different neighborhoods. I would like to highlight two examples.

Fairgrounds Neighborhood, Rubicon Park District, and the

Genesis Project: One of the neighborhoods in which we have developed a good relationship is the Fairgrounds Neighborhood which is adjacent to the University. This neighborhood is bounded on the south and east sides by the University and its student neighborhood, the Miami-Valley Hospital on the north, and the Montgomery County Fairgrounds on the West. Originally this neighborhood was built for workers of the former National Cash Register Company (today NCR) which use to be located to the south of the neighborhood. As NCR's manufacturing operations left Dayton, this neighborhood went into decline and the houses slowly deteriorated. The neighborhood developed a more transient population with a large number of boarding houses. The business districts along Brown St. and Main St. slowly deteriorated.

In 1998 and 1999 the *Leadership in Building Community* worked with this neighborhood. This neighborhood was chosen because both the University of Dayton and Miami-Valley Hospital were interested in seeing the neighborhood revitalized. During this time I was President of the University and Dick was Assistant to the President for Regional and Government Affairs. The University was in the midst of a Master Planning exercise and Dick had responsibility for liaison with the Fairgrounds Neighborhood. In 1998 we worked with the Fairgrounds Neighborhood to develop a neighborhood consensus on the vision the neighborhood had for its future and what neighborhood projects they would like to see undertaken to be able to realize this vision. In 1999 we had the opportunity to involve the class in a City Planning Department effort called the Rubicon Park District. This planning effort took the Fairgrounds Neighborhood

vision and invited the institutional neighborhood and other adjacent neighborhoods to be part of a conversation about what the vision for the larger Rubicon District should be. Out of this plan came the Genesis Project. The Genesis Project was a collaborative between the Fairgrounds Neighborhood Association, the University of Dayton, Miami Valley Hospital, City-Development Corporation, and local banks.

Much to the insistence of Dick Ferguson, many ideas from the Fairground Neighborhood vision were incorporated into the Genesis Project. To date the Genesis Project has invested over \$19 million in the housing redevelopment and economic redevelopment of the neighborhood. In 2008 the Fairgrounds Neighborhood is on its way to being a mixed income neighborhood with a large increase in home ownership and a very viable economic corridor along Brown Street. The Genesis Project started with a Fairgrounds Neighborhood Association, with the help of the University team of service-learners, developing their vision for the neighborhood and identifying neighborhood projects that would help them realize their vision. The Fairgrounds Neighborhood Association's strategic agenda then became a vital voice for the Neighborhood as it participates in the Genesis Project.

Neighborhood School Centers: I would like to share one final example of community building – what we call Neighborhood School Centers. There will be a full-fledge presentation of this initiative on Saturday at noon as part of the Common Good Symposium.

With the ending of court-order busing in the early 2000's and the opportunity to rebuild public schools, Dayton Public Schools are returning to neighborhood schools. To demonstrate the full potential of schools as the centers of their neighborhood, the Center for Leadership in Community with the support of the Dayton Foundation was asked to put together a coalition of business leaders, Public School leaders, city government, county government, and United Way partners to conceptualize and support four Dayton elementary schools as pilot "centers" for the redevelopment of their neighborhoods.

The partners looked to a growing national movement and the Coalition for Community Schools for the best examples of cities that have made schools the center of their communities. Community schools bring together many partners to offer a range of support and opportunities to children, youth, families, and communities. These partners work to ensure that:

- Children are ready to learn when they enter school and every day thereafter.
- All students learn and achieve to high standards.
- Young people are well prepared for adult roles in the workplace, as parents and as citizens.
- Families and neighborhoods are safe, supportive, and engaged.
- Parents and community members are involved with the school and their own life-long learning.

While we are only in the second year of this project it has very exciting potential for comprehensive community building in the four neighborhoods where these schools are located. The *Leadership in Building Community* has been involved in each of these neighborhoods and has helped the neighborhood develop a voice and a strategic agenda for the future.

The Neighborhood School Centers are becoming excellent opportunities for community based service learning. Student interns are helping the Site Coordinators with their duties. Student volunteers are being used for after school reading programs. Students with Spanish language skills are immensely helpful to Hispanic students and to the teachers working with them. The placements of teachers from the University's Urban Teacher academy are being focused in these Neighborhood School Centers. The Neighborhood School Centers provide an outstanding example of how community building can be used to rebuild distressed neighborhoods.

V. Conclusion

In this talk I have endeavored to share some of the experiences of the University of Dayton's Center for Leadership in Community in building sustainable partnerships with urban neighborhoods. I have outlined some of the conditions for a Catholic university or college to enter into partnerships with distressed neighborhoods of their urban community. I have explored the special challenges presented by trying to advance justice in highly distressed urban neighborhoods. I outlined a language and an approach to advancing urban justice in distressed neighborhoods which we call community building. Simply put the community building approach has both a purpose and a process. Simply put the purpose of community building is to create a neighborhood community in which children succeed and families flourish. The process dimension of community building is developing the neighborhood's capacity to solve problems, set goals and develop strategies, to realize these goals by implementing action plans, and to continue learn by reflection on dimensions of the process of change and transformation. I have also reviewed two case studies of how the Center for Leadership in Community at the University of Dayton has become a partner in advancing justice in urban communities. The experience of the University of Dayton in building urban partnerships is no magic bullet. Walsh College seems well positioned to develop partnerships that advance urban justice. I hope this talk has provided you some guidance and maybe some inspiration to make building partnership an important dimension of learning at Walsh College.

Thank you.

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Appendix A

Community Building and the Catholic Social Tradition: A Mutually Critical Dialogue

One of the reasons community building was chosen as a public language and practice theory by the Center for Leadership in Community was because of its rich possibilities of dialogue with Catholic social tradition. This Appendix illustrates in a preliminary manner some of the possibilities for this dialogue.

The image of “the human person in community” is a powerful resource for community building.

Human dignity provides many points of connection between community building and the Catholic social tradition. As the American Bishops have indicated “Human dignity can only be realized and protected only in community” (Economic Justice for All, # 28). Community building endeavors to protect and promote the human dignity of each person by providing a context for them to exercise insight and responsibility. Community building engages neighbors to think about the problems and the future of their neighborhood and to take action with others to work toward this future. Building vibrant neighborhoods that support families is one of the most important ways that we can promote human dignity. Seeing the “image of God” in other persons and in communities no matter what their circumstances provides Christians with the motivation to work at community building.

Community building provides a realistic way to work at social justice in the city.

A helpful way to view a neighborhood community is as ecology of peoples and families bound together by built or physical infrastructure and by a social fabric

of norms, practices, and institutions. Distressed neighborhoods have more cycles of loss and destruction and fewer cycles of life and regeneration. In a distressed neighborhood, the infrastructure such as housing, local businesses, schools, and playgrounds are often in poor repair and sometimes abandoned. Neighborhood norms such as being vigilant about crime, expecting children to be in school, and taking care of one's own property are missing in distressed neighborhoods and contribute to problems experienced by the neighborhood. Practices such as organizing for positive change have atrophied. Institutions like public schools and human services are not culturally appropriate for the people living in the neighborhood. To rebuild a distressed neighborhood is to assist the neighbors in not only rebuilding the infrastructure, but in rebuilding norms, practices, and institutions of the neighborhood so that the people realize their human capabilities.

Social justice, as a social virtue, is that act of organizing persons to change the social fabric and institutional structures of a community so that they advance the common good of the city. (Ferree, 1948; Novak, 1989, 1993) Community building provides a concrete and specific way to work at institutional change that helps persons, i.e., child, youth, and adult, more fully realize their human capabilities. The practice theory of community building provides a very realistic road map for advancing justice in neighborhoods and eventually in the city. The community building and social justice share a concern for institutional change to promote the common good.

Advancing the common good is a dialogical and adaptive process.

Some practitioners of social justice treat the common good as though it can be predetermined and then institutions are redesigned to realize this common good. As Michael Novak indicates, working to define the common good starts with the veil of ignorance; we don't know in advance all the dimensions of the common good. (Novak, 1993) These must be worked out through the exercise of practical reasoning and through the uncertainties of implementing the options determined through practical reasoning. Community building illustrates that advancing the common good in a neighborhood, in most cases, requires a dialogical and adaptive process in which neighbors learn together how to define problems and the goods for the neighborhood and to develop the options that will solve these problems and realize these goods.

Subsidiarity requires placing the work in the hands of the people and neighborhood organizations.

Urban communities are networks of institutions and organizations that are designed for the common good of the members of the city. The principle of subsidiarity in Catholic social tradition calls for the establishment of intermediate groups and associations between individuals and the state and means that the higher levels (the state) should never intervene when economic and political realities can be handled adequately on the local level. Families, block groups, neighborhood organizations, etc. make up these intermediate groups between individuals in a neighborhood and city and county government. Community building and Catholic social teaching converge with their emphasis on placing the primary responsibility for the self-renewal of neighborhoods in the hands of the

neighbors and neighborhood organizations. City and county government should only intervene when these organizations can not provide opportunities for people in neighborhoods to realize their full human capabilities.

Solidarity is a key to rebuilding neighborhoods and cities.

We are called by God to live in solidarity, a virtue in which we make firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to reforming institutions so that the good of our city is just for all of our citizens. This virtue of solidarity challenges us to see our city from the perspective of our neighbor and from the perspective of people who live in other neighborhoods. Solidarity challenges us to see our city from the perspective of our new widows, orphans, and strangers – to make their concerns our concerns. Solidarity challenges us to find ways for the “powerless” to participate and have an active role in building the good of our community. We will sustain the tough work of “working and acting together” for peace and justice in our city by developing the virtue of solidarity.

The consistent ethic of life supports contemporary community building in many important ways and at the same time raises important questions.

The consistent ethic of life theme of Catholic social tradition endeavors to view a number of issues, such as war, capital punishment, abortion, and many social justice issues such as poverty and hunger through a consistent moral framework that promotes life. There are many points where contemporary theories of community building and the consistent ethic of life mutually reinforce one another. For example, in the areas of promoting human dignity within a neighborhood, the participation of neighbors in shaping the future of the neighborhood, the alleviation of poverty, and the addressing of domestic violence

and child abuse and neglect, the consistent ethic of life and contemporary community building would be a mutual reinforcing of one another. On the issue of abortion and contraception, there are sometimes major differences between Catholic social tradition and some contemporary community building approaches.

Leadership in the Center endeavors to promote the convergence between the consistent ethic of life and contemporary community building. It is our experience that people concerned about justice in the city and its neighborhoods can usually agree on principles that would shape the future of a community. For example, there is usually agreement that it is good for young women to forego marriage and child bearing until they have finished their education and are ready for family obligations. Controversy comes over what methods are required to realize this desired future; issues around contraception, premarital sex, and abortion are flash points. These controversies have to be confronted by laying out how such approaches can undermine human dignity and human community.