

**Advancing Justice in the City through Community Building: Themes and Practice
Theories Emerging from the Center for Leadership in Community**

Dick Ferguson, Director, Center for Leadership in Community

**Brother Raymond L. Fitz, S.M., Ph.D.
Ferree Professor of Social Justice
University of Dayton**

Revised: September 21, 2003

This paper, first prepared for the *Catholic Social Thought Across the Curriculum* Conference at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota, October 23-25, 2003, will review the work of the Center for Leadership in Community at the University of Dayton. Part One provides an overview of the Center's mission, its emphasis on relationship building, its key themes, and examples of these themes in practice. Part Two presents community building as a public language for advancing justice in the city, describes the Center's practice theory, and illustrates the dynamic relationship between community building and the Catholic social tradition

PART ONE

Recently, a local community partner denied an annual request from one of our University's faith-based service centers to host students for a Sunday afternoon urban plunge for reasons that the authors of this paper strongly support and endorse. The planned experience was a narrowly focused event to introduce predominantly middle class, suburban, college students to the ills of the urban environment: drugs, homelessness, illiteracy, poverty, and hopelessness. The message of the denial was very clear: a faith-based, middle class view of an urban community is sometimes short sighted,

biased, and unjust. The neighborhood was saying something like this. “We are a gifted community with assets that are being leveraged to improve our neighborhood, our people, and our institutions. We welcome you to help us to do that. But let’s start with a respect for the many assets of our urban community and an appreciation of the fact that many universities’ faith-based programs have focused for too long only on what they perceive only as needy and underprivileged.”

Community-based service and, in recent years, community-based learning and scholarship have become important elements of university curricula and firmly established dimensions of faith-based initiatives sponsored by many Catholic universities. In urban settings, these service and learning initiatives provide opportunities to integrate disciplinary insights and faith development around the issues of justice for children and families and the development of neighborhood communities. Multiple centers at the University of Dayton are so engaged in Dayton’s urban neighborhoods.

Community Building

The integrating theme of the new Center for Leadership in Community (2002) is the education of persons who “lead to build community.” Such “community builders” may be students, faculty, staff, alumni, neighbors, human service and criminal justice professionals, scholars, business leaders, foundations, governments, churches, and neighborhood associations. Communities, we are learning, are built by individuals, institutions, and voluntary associations that share a vision. They engage one another and partner with one another to create shared futures for neighborhoods and communities. When informed or inspired by social thought that our tradition labels as Catholic, such

communities also are characterized by greater respect for persons, realization of the common good, and preferential consideration of the poor.

The mission of the Center is “to initiate and sustain partnerships with urban neighborhoods and larger communities that both work at comprehensive community building and provide a context for connected learning and scholarship.” The Center maintains partnerships with numerous urban neighborhood associations and community-based institutions. Many of these relationships have been cultivated over three decades by a predecessor organization and through over 250 years of collective community leadership experience by the Center team of faculty, staff, and students.

When the Center undertakes initiatives with these partners, we do so with a shared notion of the desired outcome – sometimes articulated in writing. We also insist on mutuality.

- Is there something in the initiative that will generate community value?
- Is there a learning opportunity?

If both are not present, the Center is not likely to engage. When faculty, staff, and students associated with the Center undertake such community-based learning with our partner neighborhoods and organizations, we do so in a way that all parties believe will contribute to the community building agenda that has been developed in the community – sometimes with assistance from the Center. The most important question asked early on is “Who’s agenda is it?”

Themes

The emerging community building mission of the Center integrates best practices of community development and organizing, some new notions of leadership, and insights of the Catholic social tradition. The major community building and leadership themes are illustrated below with examples. The characterization of these practices as contemporary social justice methods is explained in Part Two.

Five community building themes rise from our experiences in urban Dayton and our understanding of our experiences from insightful scholars and social commentators.

- Communities are built on assets – not needs.
- Social capital must be cultivated (trust, information sharing, shared norms).
- Community leaders must balance inquiry and advocacy to identify shared futures.
- For communities to adapt, leadership must emphasize learning together and leading with or without authority.
- To think and act together, communities must learn the arts of dialogue and deliberation.

These are not original insights on our part. Each of these themes has already been championed by one or more social commentators. Their writings have helped us make sense of our community experience.

Theme 1: Asset-based community development has been popularized by John McKnight and Jody Kretzmann of Northwestern University's Center for Urban Affairs. But others have joined the post-Alinsky community organizing chorus. The Search Institute has applied the asset approach extensively to youth development

efforts. Paul Grogan and Tony Proscio have documented the impact of the assets approach in countless urban communities in their book *Comeback Cities*. And Joyce Ladner has called such organizing a new form of civil rights leadership in urban communities in her book *The New Urban Leaders*.

In *The Careless Society: Community and its Counterfeits*, John McKnight distinguishes between communities and the human service systems of communities. “Communities depend upon capacities,” he writes. “Systems commodify deficiencies.” Since much community-based service and learning occurs in human service agencies, it is important to the Center that we distinguish community-based service and learning experiences from community building.

The primary means we utilize to encourage all of us to stay focused on community building is the practice of asset mapping. Graduate students, undergraduates, high school students, and even second graders have been introduced to the practice of starting their work by identifying, describing, and “mapping” the individuals, institutions, and associations in or available to communities to develop themselves. Creating “asset banks” with which to strategize like financial resources is empowering. Communities, like individuals, are all gifted in some ways. Before focusing on the needs to be met and the deficits to be compensated for, community builders must first acknowledge the unique gifts and assets present to the community. In Dayton in 2003, neighborhood leaders expect this form of respect.

The Center has taught hundreds of people how to develop these asset banks, and now we are helping neighborhoods to literally “map” assets using Geographic Information Systems (GIS). This is not to deny the pressing needs of these same

communities. The needs are real, but in our experience they are not the stuff with which communities build. We get back to meeting basic needs after we see where we want to go together.

Community computers are among the assets we have turned up in virtually every neighborhood in urban Dayton. To build on the assets, however, many communities ask that the University assist with networking, web site development, marketing, training, and trouble shooting software issues. Our Community Computer Consultants, a student enterprise, serves the community by responding to requests to make community computers more useful to the people they are meant to assist without creating a long-term, dependent relationship. Such a project meets our expectation of mutuality and leverages existing assets within the community. The need to close the digital divide is real, but we start with an asset – the community computers.

Theme 2: Social capital and its demise have been at the heart of the scholarship of Robert Putnam of Harvard as documented in his *Bowling Alone* classic. Although many have rebutted his views of social capital's demise in United States society, few have questioned its importance to community building. Relationships matter. To attempt to build community programs without a modicum of trust, information sharing, and shared norms appears to most community scholars and practitioners to be fruitless.

Social capital may or may not be present in an asset bank. Though most community organizers acknowledge the essential nature of strong relationships to

communities, many neighborhoods find the task of developing social capital an ongoing challenge. According to Robert Putnam, it has three forms: information sharing, trust and general reciprocity, and norms and shared values that maintain social order. Like financial capital and human capital, Putnam argues, social capital is a resource to be productively leveraged.

The Center's own neighborhood has provided our own best example of this theme in action. The University of Dayton and its Rubicon Park neighbors (four neighborhoods, a business district, a few schools, NCR Corporation, Miami Valley Hospital, and a multi-site national park built around the work of the Wright Brothers) have developed a shared vision of our community's future. The process of maintaining such relationships in such unlike institutions and cultures is difficult. We are committed to the vision being a shared vision – not the University's, or the hospital's, or the neighborhood residents' alone, but a shared description of the common good. Significantly, our neighborhood includes some of the poorest and wealthiest individuals and organizations in urban Dayton. A meeting place, Rubicon House, is sponsored by the Center and a local bank as a tactic to build social capital. Our objective is to bring multiple institutional visions and individual interests into conversation with one another – usually over coffee.

Theme 3: Balancing inquiry and advocacy was first popularized by Chris Argyris in the 1990s. He noted the importance of balancing the strong advocacy skills of many activists with the art of inquiry – the genuine skill of facilitating understanding rather than simply winning the argument. Today, such thinking is experiencing a new

found appreciation among students and faculty members who want to find new ways to have an impact through sharing their “mental models,” listening actively, and remaining open to compromise in the public policy arena.

Balancing inquiry and advocacy is difficult among passionate people. However, when confronted with the behavior of an unabashed advocate, most recognize the inherent risk to advocacy that is not balanced with openness to new learning. Productive advocacy, in our experience, reveals one’s thinking behind points of view and offers examples. Likewise, productive inquiry explores others’ thinking or assumptions and suspends judgment until these are considered. The willingness to engage others’ ideas with a sincere desire to understand their points of view is, in our experience, an essential community building skill. Such active listening requires most of us to suspend judgment long enough to listen fully to ideas, explanations, and underlying convictions.

The Center’s work here usually involves faculty. Communities do not always find faculty expertise useful in their grassroots efforts. One University of Dayton faculty member illustrates this by explaining that his partner (a neighborhood development corporation) is more interested in his attendance at evening meetings than in his discipline (management). *Occasionally*, his expertise is needed. His solidarity with the neighborhood is *always* needed. Faculty members venturing into such partnerships must actually practice holding back their expertise to allow the community to invite them to share it. Most expertise has to be translated to the local culture and situation anyway. Seldom is the faculty member able to advocate for a

position in all circumstances. The first task is to learn along with the community, to inquire into the thinking behind current practice, and to build some mutual trust.

The Center is currently hosting such a conversation among faculty members from academic programs in social agency counseling, clinical psychology, and music therapy, and the professional staff of a large local service agency to practice this balancing technique before embarking on a partnership to develop student internship opportunities. Social service providers and the faculty members who prepared them for their work academically do not share the same daily life experiences. Their interpretations of social realities are often different from one another. Building community means learning how to remain open to insights other than one's own even after achieving professional stature as academic scholar or service provider.

Theme 4: The distinction between “**technical solutions**” and “**adaptive solutions**” and the requisite capacity of communities and institutions to know the difference is at the core of the scholarship of Ronald Heifetz of Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government. A physician and musician by training, this leadership commentator has challenged those who would lead to see their role as helping communities and organizations to learn. Moreover, he has demonstrated with ample case studies in his books *Leadership without Easy Answers* and *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* that authority and expert knowledge are not what communities need most to move forward on their most intransigent (“adaptive”) challenges. Facilitators of group learning are the community leaders of the future, according to our reading of Heifetz.

For most pressing community challenges, answers (and sometimes even clear questions) are not readily apparent. In such situations, the “adaptive capacity” of the community or organization is largely defined by its ability to learn together. In Dayton, challenges to our adaptive capacity include such issues as declining urban population base, highly concentrated urban poverty, failing urban schools, racial distrust, truancy, predatory lending, and violent crime. Does anyone at any university have answers to such problems? Yes, partially. But in our experience, no comprehensively authoritative solution exists to be imported to Dayton to solve these problems. Leadership, with or without authority, that is able to help the community frame the issue, build trust, explore alternative solutions, regulate distress, and learn together what might work best for Dayton is much needed. The Center’s mission, in part, is to help prepare such leaders.

Center initiatives to build our community’s adaptive capacity include long-term relationships with most neighborhood associations and development corporations. Years ago, our predecessor organization assisted many of these associations to form and helped them to grow. Having exhausted most purely technical solution alternatives to the issues they face today, the neighborhood associations and development corporations most appreciate a simple program hosted annually by the Center called “CityLinks.” In this forum, now 20 years old, neighborhood leaders share their own best practices, swap information, and honor achievements among themselves. Guest speakers (including John McKnight, Joseph McNeely, Paul Grogan, Joyce Ladner, and others) honor the neighborhood leaders by their presence and their insights into the meaning and value of their leadership. The toughest issues

facing the neighborhoods are always at the center of these conversations, but the direction of the conversation is new learning and shared understanding of underlying causes. In recent years, more and more City leaders, foundations, human service professionals, and church leaders have attended CityLinks. University faculty members attend and listen. Students, on occasion, present results of service-learning projects or community based research. CityLinks is adaptive capacity building at its Dayton best.

Theme 5: Dialogue and deliberation have their place in community building – at the beginning. We have looked to MIT and the *Dialogos* group led by William Isaacs for better understanding of the art of **dialogue** and to David Matthews and the work of the Kettering Foundation, based in Dayton, for insight into **deliberative democracy** and the emerging power of issues forums in building community agendas.

In our experience, strategic planning, program implementation, and assessment are better developed community leadership skills than are the arts of leading dialogue and facilitating deliberation. The problem, as we have encountered it, is that doing things together requires that we “be something” together. As Joseph Jaworski, author of *Synchronicity*, described in a speech to the Greenleaf Servant Leader Conference in 1997, “It’s about being in a doing world.” Communities frequently organize around a first project (usually precipitated by a crisis). But second, third, and fourth projects result from the ability to sustain the relationship (being together).

Dialogue (suspending judgment and sharing openly) and deliberation (choosing among alternatives as a community) are essential skills of a civic community and desirable skills of almost any sort of human community. In Dayton, the Dayton Dialogue on Race and its many predecessors have kept the community conversation on race and racism alive for almost 40 years. Participation in the dialogue and sponsorship of opportunities for the University community to be in the dialogue is a role of the Center. The topic of “race and racism” is easily the most divisive in our community and the one most requiring the community to learn to suspend judgment long enough to listen to another’s reality.

On the deliberative side, introducing the necessity of choice into a student’s experience of community is critical. Annually, in a seminar entitled *Leadership in Building Communities*, we engage as faculty and students with a neighborhood making critical choices about its future. Many find the harsh necessity of choosing among multiple “goods” or between “two bads” painful. The political reality of community deliberation and decision making is more personal and seemingly understandable at the neighborhood level than at the city, county, or state level. Nonetheless, it is the experience of United States democracy as described by Alexis de Toqueville in 1831, and it makes politics real for all seminar participants. The value added to the neighborhood community by the interaction with students and faculty usually takes the form of a more fully explored decision or plan. Like most Center projects, mutuality requires community results *and* learning outcomes.

The community perspective on the work of the Center for Leadership in Community begins with a growing recognition that the leadership challenges facing

our community require adaptive learning across professional and community sectors. The Center has established a reputation as an effective community partner with urban Dayton on difficult community leadership issues. The Center and the University are adding value to Dayton by brokering and helping to lead ongoing and important community partnerships.

The University of Dayton perspective on the Center is as it relates to its vision of institutional leadership. Connected learning is key to the university vision, and the Center facilitates community connected learning. The University aspires to prepare distinctive graduates who understand and appreciate Catholic social teaching and Marianist ideals. Both traditions inform the experiences offered through the Center. The linking of the Center to Catholic social teaching and Marianist ideals is a primary responsibility of the Ferree Professor of Social Justice.

PART TWO

The Center for Leadership in Community at the University of Dayton is organized around the mission of learning and scholarship through community building. Part Two of his paper explains the Center concept of community building as both a public language of engagement and a practice theory. First, community building is presented as a public language for advancing justice in the city; second, the Center's practice theory of community building is described; and third, the dynamic relations between community building and the Catholic social tradition are illustrated.

Finding a Public Language for Justice in the City

Catholic universities are called to promote justice in the city. In *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* John Paul II give this call with clarity.

A Catholic university, as any university, is immersed in human society; as an extension of its service to the Church and always within its proper competence, it is called on to become an ever more effective instrument of cultural progress for individuals as well as for society. Included among its research activities, therefore, will be a study of serious contemporary problems in areas such as the dignity of human life, the promotion of justice for all, the quality of personal and family life, the protection of nature, the search for peace and political stability, a more just sharing in the world's resources, and a new economic and political order that will better serve the human community at a national and international level. University research will seek to discover the roots and causes of the serious problems of our time, paying special attention to their ethical and religious dimensions. (ECE #32)

If Catholic universities are to heed this call to place the most urgent problems of the world community at the center of mission of learning and scholarship, then it must find ways to make these problems at the center of teaching, research, and service. Through the Center for Leadership in Community, the University of Dayton is asking how it can advance justice in the city.

To advance justice in the city we needed to find a public language to engage people in this task. We believe that there are at least three important requirements for this public language of engagement. First, the public language must relate to the experiences of a wide variety of people as well as it has to be able to carry the conversations of serious academic learning and scholarship. The public language must give all involved a way to talk about the problems of the city and the human goods to be realized as well as the strategies to be used in addressing problems and realizing the goods. Second, this public language must be able to enter into a reciprocal dialogue with the Catholic social

tradition that is at the center of the intellectual life of a Catholic university. The language of engagement must share some of the rich images, metaphors, and constructs of the Catholic social tradition that allows for a mutually enriching dialogue. Third, the language must be able to promote integration and mobilize comprehensive action. Advancing justice in the city requires a consistent and comprehensive approach to addressing the economic, political, and cultural aspects of the City. The language must also promote interdisciplinary engagement of faculty and students as they appreciate the problems of neighborhoods and larger urban communities – what we like to call “connected learning and scholarship.”

At the Center for Leadership in Community at the University of Dayton, we believe community building is an appropriate language for this task of community based service and learning and for advancing justice in the city. We explain the Center through three questions:

- **What do we do?:** engage in learning and scholarship through community building
- **Why do we do it?:** to advance justice in the city.
- **How do we do it?:** by initiating and sustaining community partnerships.

In the sections below our emerging practice theory of community building is outlined and is related to Catholic social teaching.

Community Building in Distressed Neighborhoods: A Practice Theory

A practice theory of community building describes the *purpose* and the *process* of community building. We have developed our practice theory of community building by

being part of a national conversation that has been spearheaded by a number of national foundations, like the Anne E. Casey Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation, and seeing how these ideas apply to our local setting. Our approach to building a practice theory is to make explicit our working assumptions and from time to time reflect on how our experiences, reading, reflections and the criticism by our colleagues, inside and outside the University, are challenging us to rethink these assumptions. Our practice theory can be summarized in five interrelated assumptions. The first assumption talks about the purpose of community building and the remaining assumptions talk about the process of community building.

1. *For the Center, the purpose of community building in distressed neighborhoods is creating the conditions which support families.* 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 have a lack of people who can relate them to the world of work.

At the root of these problems, most often is the lack of human, financial, and social capital. To change their plight and life in their neighborhoods, people need skills

and knowledge, they need to have at least modest personal property and resources, and they need the habits and skills to organize for positive change. Community building must build these three types of capital. We have found that the building of social capital, the ability to collaborate and organize for positive change, is the most important and the most challenging.

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 live 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.”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 that support families. Thriving communities and neighborhoods support families in three important ways²:

- Families must have an opportunity to work, earn a decent living, and have the opportunity to build family assets.
- Families must have access to networks supportive relations that include families, friends, neighbors, community institutions, like Boy and Girl Scouts, church and faith-based organizations, and civic organizations like neighborhood organizations.
- Families must have access to service from government and not-for-profit agencies that are responsible and culturally appropriate.

¹ This phrase was used in a Casey Foundation Report on Neighborhood Transformation/Family Development at website: www.aecf.org

² These three condition are at the center of the Casey Foundation program on Neighborhood Transformation/Family Development at website: www.aecf.org

To address the justice in distressed neighborhoods, we need to engage in community building which finds ways to mobilize every part of our community – every not-for-profit agency, faith based group, neighborhood organization, and agency of county and city government around the agenda of reconnecting the families of our distressed neighborhoods to all of these important resources.

2. *Initially community building requires engaging neighbors in a way that builds trust and emphasizes 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 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 see how these assets can be used to help the neighborhood build the capability to work toward its vision. 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.

3. *Community building requires an agenda for change and networks of relationships.* 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 solution, implementing these solutions, and learning how to better in 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 need to power change is time consuming work. People have multiple obligations with work and family that can distract them from the work of community building. 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 relations strong.

4. *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 neighborhood are often complex and ambiguous and they require the neighborhood and resource people be willing to questions some of the assumptions that they hold about these problems and how they might be solved. There may be many perspectives on as 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 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 a 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 or interconnected way. Overtime, community building makes the move from this core group of neighbors engaged in 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.

5. Sustaining the community building process over time requires developing multiple partnerships between the Neighborhood Based Organization and organizations external to the neighborhood. The Neighborhood Based Organization provides an indispensable human and social resource for the neighborhood, knowledge of the neighborhood and its problems, and the trust and participation of the residents. Yet, Neighborhood Based Organizations often lack the financial or other resources need to implement the agenda. Small projects like the 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 sale of the houses.

For the Center for Leadership in Community, community building is a **process** with a **purpose**.³ The **process** of community building in a neighborhood is the continuous self-renewing efforts by residents and professionals to engage in collective action, problem solving, and neighborhood enrichment. The **purpose** of community building in neighborhoods is to improve the lives of families and children, to create new and strengthened neighborhood assets, relationships, and institutions, and to set new standards and expectations for life within the neighborhood.

A Practice Theory in Dialogue with Catholic Social Tradition

Community building was chosen as a public language and practice theory by the Center for Leadership in Community because it has rich possibilities of dialogue with Catholic social tradition. This section provides a few statements of the potential for this dialogue.

1. *The human person in community is powerful organizing image for community building.* On the issues of human dignity there are many points of connection. 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

³ This definition is adapted from a speech given by Angela Blackwell in a Casey Foundation Conference in March 1999.

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 Christian with the motivation to work at community building.

2. *Community building provides a realistic way to work at social justice in the city.* Social justice, as an individual virtue, is that act of organizing persons to change the institutional structures of a community so that they advance the common good of the city. Community building provides a concrete and specific way to work at institutional change that helps persons, i.e., child, youth, and adults, more fully realize their human capabilities. The practice theory of community building provides a very realistic road map for advancing justice in the city. The community building and social justice share a concern for institutional change to promote the common good.

3. *The consistent ethic of life that is part of Catholic social tradition raises important supports and well as challenges to contemporary models of community building.* 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 build would be a mutual reinforcing of one another. On the issue of abortion and contraception, there are often major differences between Catholic social tradition and the 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 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.

4. *Advancing the common good is an 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 the common good starts with the veil of ignorance, we don't know in advance all the dimensions of the common good. These must be worked out through the exercise of practical intelligence and through the uncertainties of implementing practical intelligence. Community building illustrates that advancing the common good in a neighborhood, in most cases, requires an adaptive process in which

neighbors learn together how to define problems and the goods for the neighborhood and define solutions to these problems.

5. *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 individual 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.

6. *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.

Conclusion

The Center for Leadership in Community at the University of Dayton is organized around the mission of learning and scholarship through community building. The Center’s practice theory of community building that emerges from conversations of theory and practice with people engaged in the theory and practice of community building is explained. It is also illustrated how this practice theory and Catholic social tradition are mutually enriching for one another. Hopefully this paper will stimulate further conversation on justice in the City

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