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A Response to Poverty

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A Response to Poverty

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A Response to Poverty

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Abstract

Current social norms support statistics that reflect the uneven distribution of economic resources within the United States. Local Catholic parishes, including its parishioners, have a responsibility to address the needs of the poor by participating in outreach to others. This is true within upper-income parishes where access to a variety of resources could provide support to those with far fewer resources. Church tradition provides the means for understanding why care for the poor is a priority and responsibility in the life of a parish. The belief of "*imago Dei*" forms a basis of establishing that human life has value due to the equal dignity that is present in all of humanity. Within this broad context, the Second Vatican Council maintained that the Church has a mission to be a sacrament of salvation that animates Jesus' ministry of care for life in the world today. Subsequently, church members have a responsibility to be the animators for her mission by answering the call to create and form a community in which there exists mutual responsibility and kinship amongst all her members.

A Response to Poverty

Bread of Life Soup Kitchen, located in southern California, is an organization that ministers and cares for a primarily poor, Hispanic community by providing groceries, medical care, English language classes and companionship between its guests and workers.[1] "Soup kitchen" is somewhat of a misnomer at Bread of Life due to the many services that are offered to its guests including scholarships for young adults wishing to attend a university.

Bianca is one of the Soup Kitchen scholarship students and she possesses a strong work ethic combined with a desire to succeed. She prides herself on being highly organized with respect to her responsibilities at home and at work so that she has sufficient time available to focus on her studies. Bianca's motivation comes from her mother, who told Bianca many years earlier that she needed to find her own desire to succeed in life because no one else would help her to achieve success. Taking her mother's words to heart, Bianca desires to be a person that will help others to succeed. She has aspirations of someday earning a doctorate degree in social work so that she can continue to help those in her community succeed in their lives.

Bianca's mother was prophetic in that Bianca needed to be self-sufficient to find success. Bianca's path to success through a university degree was challenging; not only due to lack of finances but due to the initial application process. She is the first to attend college in her family and none of her family members were able to help her with the application process. She also could not find adequate help at her high school, and so she tackled the application process on her own. As a result, the applications were not correctly completed, and she did not immediately gain entrance to a university. Her second attempt at the application process was more fruitful, and although she was denied entrance to a local university due to an incomplete application, she

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[1] The names of the soup kitchen and its guests have been changed.

did get accepted into another university that is an hour from her home. She admits that she incurs additional travel costs, but she cherishes her seat in this school. Now Bianca is a champion to others in her community that are contemplating college. She encourages them to attend and works with them to make sure that their applications are in order. Bianca admits, though, that several of her friends have become discouraged with the barriers that they have encountered both within the application process and navigating a college course load. Like Bianca, they have no one to help them navigate the college process.

Alejandro is another scholarship student at the Soup Kitchen. Due to his status as an undocumented person in the United States, he had no access to financial aid which caused him to postpone his dreams of enrolling in a university. Instead he spent an extended length of time at the local community college, earning multiple A. A. degrees. His family is poor and, due to their immigration status, they are prohibited from having legal employment, something that would help lift them out of poverty. As a result they struggle to pay their rent and to feed themselves.

Recently Alejandro has been able to help boost the family's economic situation through the U.S. government's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. He has been able to obtain a driver's license, gain employment and receive financial aid for tuition at a university. He prides himself on his strong work ethic which is evidenced by his long hours at his job, sandwiched in between school and homework. Alejandro is also responsible for getting his mother to her job and for getting his younger brother off to school. He admits that most nights he receives only four to five hours of sleep.

Alejandro has many of the strong character traits and hardworking habits that most U.S. families desire for their own children. He longs for the American dream of success and is a model of a stellar citizen, who desires to take care of himself and his family. Alejandro admits

that he struggles to remain motivated in his studies because of his overwhelming responsibility to his family. DACA allows him the means to attend school, but it does not offer direct support to him in his daily life. Alejandro longs for a "cheerleader" to help him stay motivated and to help him battle discouragement; he worries that someday his responsibilities will dominate his desire to complete college.

Twenty minutes away and juxtaposed with the lives of these students is an active, mostly white, upper-income and Franciscan Catholic parish: parishioners worship together, experience sacramental life, engage in catechesis and interact with one another. Like other church communities, this parish nourishes the faith of its parishioners. The Soup Kitchen requests assistance from the parishioners at this parish to help minister to the needs of poor families, like Bianca and Alejandro's: families which rely upon the Soup Kitchen's good and services to survive. In response, a few steady volunteers faithfully help on-site and a handful of other volunteers donate needed food supplies and various household goods. Most parishioners, however, are unaware or apathetic to the plights of many people that live only a short distance away.

Very few of the parishioners have knowledge of the levels of poverty that these families experience; nor can they fathom the living conditions of the Soup Kitchen families. The parishioners lack an awareness of the role that they could provide in response to the injustices of poverty. As an upper-income parish, most parishioners are college educated and therefore could also provide needed mentoring to students like Bianca and Alejandro; assistance that would help people to move themselves and their families out of poverty.

Current social and cultural norms paint a picture of a nation with rich resources that are unevenly distributed, and indicators suggest that this trend is not correcting itself. Likewise, the

ecclesial practices of Christians do not always tend toward the care of the less fortunate or sharing resources with them. Local Catholic parishes, including its parishioners, have a responsibility to address the needs of the poor by participating in outreach to others, a role that is contained within the larger, global Church. This is especially important in upper-income parishes where parishioner's access to a multitude of resources has the ability of providing much needed support to those with far fewer resources.

Contextual Aspects of Poverty

Poverty in the lives of people of Hispanic descent is not an isolated situation in Southern California. In the year 2013, 12.7 million Hispanics in the U.S. lived below the poverty line and comprised 23.5% of the poor in the U.S. Within these statistics, 4.86 million Hispanics, or 38%, lived in households headed by females who typically earn less than males. On average, in 2013 for a family of four, the U.S. poverty level was set at annual household incomes below $23,834, or $458 a week.[2] By comparison, families categorized as upper-income in 2013 annually earned $132,000 or $2,538 per week; more than five times the income levels of people categorized as lower-income.[3] In addition the overall wealth, or monetary worth less any outstanding debt, for upper-income families is 70 times that of lower-income families.[4] In the U.S. there is clearly a large economic divide between people that live at poverty level and people considered as upper-income.

Levels of poverty are influenced by a variety of factors including the level of education that is attained and therefore poverty decreases as one's level of education increases. The

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[2] Carmen De Navas-Walt and Bernadette D. Proctor, "Income and Poverty in the United States: 2013," United States Census Bureau, accessed May 22, 2015, http://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2014/demo/p60-249.pdf, 43, 49.

[3] Richard Fry and Rakesh Kochhar, "America's wealth gap between middle-income and upper-income families is widest on record," accessed May 22, 2015, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/12/17/wealth-gap-upper-middle-income/ 12/17/14.

[4] Ibid.

Stanford Center on Poverty & Equality reveals that the poverty rates are highest for people with less than a high school education. Inversely, poverty rates reduce sharply for people that have completed college. In 2012 poverty levels for people with a college education versus people with less than a high education dropped from 33.9% to 4.5%; a spread of nearly 30 percentage points.[5] The trend for people without higher education indicates that they have a greater chance of living in poverty. These statistics, while sobering, do not tell the story of what it means to be poor in the U.S.

Theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez summarizes poverty as death.[6] He refers to it as a lack of basic necessities, including housing, food, health care and education. In addition, workers are often exploited or unemployed and experience a "lack of respect for one's human dignity."[7] The effects of poverty are destructive to both individuals and to families; it is a degrading condition in which one is not aware of their status as a person.[8] Poverty is also a condition that is very detrimental to children. More than half of children living in families headed by females live in poverty and are "so poorly nourished" that they face serious harm that effects both physical and mental development.[9] Poverty is "profound" deprivation in which the poor are denied access to "full participation in the economic, social and political" life to the extent that they are not able to exercise influence over decisions that affect their life.[10]

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[5] Sheldon Danziger & Christopher Wimer, "State of the Union: The Poverty and Integration Report," The Stanford Center on Poverty & Equality, 2014, accessed May 23, 2015, http://web.stanford.edu/group/scspi/sotu/SOTU_2014_CPI.pdf , 16.

[6] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis 1988), *xxi.*

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., xxi and 164.

[9] United States Catholic Bishops, "Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy," (Washington D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1986), paragraphs 172, 176.

[10] United States Catholic Bishops, "Economic Justice for All," paragraph 188.

Poverty rates are particularly high for the nearly 6 million undocumented Hispanics present in the U.S.[11] The country's economic and cultural need for unskilled and low paid agricultural workers is what initially brought many Latinos to the U.S. However, through the end of the 20th century and into the 21st century, the nation transitioned into a service-based economy that was perceived as requiring more skilled labor.[12] The U.S. Social Security Administration defines unskilled labor as work consisting of simple tasks that can be quickly learned on the job, which requires little or no judgement from the worker, and does not enhance the workers over all skill set.[13] U.S. immigration policies, reflecting the change in the economic make-up of its workforce, limit the number of visas that it issues to people without particular job skills. This has translated into fewer opportunities for citizenship for people that are classified as unskilled labor. Therefore unskilled workers that desire to migrate to the U.S. mainly must do so without proper documentation.[14]

The trend and demand for cheap labor continues in the U.S. today as most native-born households are not a primary source of unskilled labor and the agriculture industry is still reliant on cheap unskilled labor. In addition, other U.S. industries such as construction and manufacturing seek cheap labor from Mexico; in fact in 2005 these undocumented workers comprised a major share of these workforces.[15] The demand for cheap goods provided by cheap labor in the U.S. creates a migration incentive for those in Latin America who want to escape the

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[11] Pew Research Center, last modified November 18, 2014, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/11/18/5-facts-about-illegal-immigration-in-the-u-s/ .

[12] Lisa M. Martinez, "Dreams Deferred: The Impact of Legal Reforms on Undocumented Latino Youth," *American Behavioral Scientist* 58 (2014): 1875.

[13] United States Social Security Administration, Code of Regulations, section 404.1568: Skill Requirements, SSA, accessed May 30, 2015, http://www.ssa.gov/OP_Home/cfr20/404/404-1568.htm .

[14] Maria Chavez, Jessica L. Lavariega, Melissa R. Michelson, *Living the Dream: New Immigration Policies and the Lives of Undocumented Latino Youth*, (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2014), 29.

[15] Maria Chavez, Jessica L. Lavariega, Melissa R. Michelson, *Living the Dream,* 29.

poverty of their native land. These workers are not documented and therefore slip through U.S. policies that are put in place to protect workers.

Therefore, a reduction of available visas for unskilled workers and the continued need for cheap labor have encouraged workers and their children to continue to migrate to the U.S. Once here their labor is exploited to feed the need for cheap services in the U.S. Therefore U.S citizens are partially responsible for the situations that have created large numbers of undocumented workers living in poverty in the U.S. Furthermore, by assigning a status of "illegal" to those without documents, the nation has created a second class of disadvantaged persons: those that are documented and those that are not documented. This drives a wedge between the two groups which dilute each group's voices as they try to better advocate for their lives.

Some of the same citizens that desire cheap goods are the white upper and middle income citizens, the dominant class in the U.S. They resist cultural changes which would alleviate the suffering of the poor but threaten their status as the dominant culture and therefore benefit from keeping repressive behaviors in place.[16] For example, the extended DACA and Deferred Action for Parental Accountability (DAPA) programs are not popular within the state of Texas, a politically conservative state, partially because these federal programs allow undocumented people access to driver's licenses which inflicts "economic injury" onto the state.[17] The state's actions seem to be more angled toward creating an unhospitable living environment for those that are undocumented. Driver's licenses allow people access to work which enables them to afford car insurance. Both of these aspects facilitate greater earnings potential, and a greater tax

[16] Mary Ann Hinsdale, "Heeding the Voices: An Historical Overview," *In the Embrace of God: Feminist Approaches to Theological Anthropology,* ed. Ann O'Hara Graff, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995), 25.
[17] Donald Kerwin, "The 'Significant Injury' the DAPA and Expanded DACA Programs Would Inflict on the State of Texas and the United States," *The Huffington Post*, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/donald-kerwin/the-significant-injury_b_7143196.html , May 27, 2015.

base, for people which would actually would allow for greater earning potential and reduced

liability within the state. This example illustrates that the dominant class can have a perspective

of dominance in which they perceive that their social identities, cultural practices and social

status are "normative, universal and ubiquitous," and any behavior otherwise is seen as a threat

to their status quo.[18] Also, any other cultures that fit into other social and economic classes are

deemed as deviant and not normative.[19]

This concept of dominance is referred to as White middle-class privilege wherein the

dominant group has an unmerited advantage given to it by reason of either race, social position,

religion or gender.[20] The social identities that one must possess in order to be considered as

privileged are unconscious to the person anointed with them as they assume it to be their natural

right. For example the privileged assume that it is normative behavior to be upwardly mobile and

therefore any other types of behavior that are not perceived to be advancing one's place in

society is considered to be deviant. This type of behavior facilitates the oppression of other

classes as the dominant class does not feel that they have a responsibility to alleviate another

class' suffering as the lower class is not capable of being upwardly mobile. This behavior also

relegates the lower class to living in a cycle of poverty.

Those that are privileged have an expectation of being treated fairly which gives them the

ability to assume that they will get what they desire and need. This translates into an expectation

of safe, clean homes and neighborhoods, the liberty to spend their money freely, the knowledge

that they are free from daily strife and that government structures are to their benefit.[21] Over time

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[18] William Ming Liu, Theodore Pickett Jr., and Allen E. Ivy, "White Middle-Class Privilege: Social Class Bias and Implications for Training and Practice," Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, Vol. 35, October 2007: 196.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid., 195.

[21] Liu, "White Middle-Class Privilege," 199.

and through many positive experiences, this attitude translates into many positive outcomes which ultimately leads to success. The converse is also true for people in the lower classes who consistently experience failure. They are discriminated against in their daily interactions with the dominant class and they have very little input into their work situations. Hence, there is little possibility for success in their life. Father Greg Boyle says that the "principal suffering of the poor is not that they can't pay their rent on time," but is the shame and disgrace they experience by "failure of the whole self."[22]

The postmodern culture is also one that embraces attitudes of individualism and indifference that are fueled by its feelings of hypocrisy and irrelevance toward Christianity. The danger of indifference is that it breeds a culture of apathy that discourages "imagining anew" a solution to another's problem, such as overcoming poverty, and instead it encourages anonymity wherein one avoids feelings of responsibility toward someone or something.[23] Anonymity can lead to a "loss of meaning of the Self," and the "worth and sacredness of the human person," which are elements that are integral to forming meaningful relationships.[24]

The postmodern culture is also governed by consumerism, a practice that encourages an increasing consumption of goods. This is a threat to society because it fuels an inward focus on satisfying "real needs, especially those artificially induced by advertising," which create an artificial "society of plenty."[25] An attitude of anonymity, coupled with a culture of consumerism "erodes one's sense of personal responsibility to a larger community or tradition" and diverts

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[22] Gregory Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion*, (NewYork: Free Press, 2010), 52.

[23] Ilia Delio, O.S.F., *Franciscan Identity and Postmodern Culture*, Kathleen Warren, ed. (New York: The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure University, 2003), 28.

[24] Leonardo Boff, *Saint Francis: A Model for Human Liberation* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1982), 5.

[25] Leonardo Boff, *Saint Francis*, 7.

one's focus instead to one's own needs.[26] This type of environment creates inequalities and insufferable poverty for the poor, while reducing the affluent person's existence to primarily having one's artificial needs met.[27] In this cultural model neither group has the possibility of living a fulfilled life.

Apathy toward alleviating the condition of the poor is not confined to cultural norms. Within the context of the Church people are apt to focus on themselves at the exclusion of the needs of others. Gutiérrez addresses a type of spirituality that is considered to be individualistic and is characterized by a relationship between one's self and God. This type of spirituality ignores the presence of others (and their life's conditions) and encourages Christians to be "absorbed in their own interiority" as a way to develop their own spirituality and perfection.[28] This type of privatized religion is classified as having an interior life with "little or no connection with the outside world.[29]

Gutierrez views privatized religion as a break down in Christianity and he warns that a more wide-spread decline in other communal aspects of the faith may further erode its overall spiritual traditions. The risk in erosion of Christian practices may create a more individualistic form of Christianity putting in peril its communal aspects. Gutiérrez refers to the loss of communal aspects of Christianity as a "dangerous privatization of spirituality" which when combined with individualism distorts the following of Jesus as an advocate for others.[30]

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[26]Delio, O.S.F., *Franciscan Identity,* 28.
[27] Boff, *Saint Francis*, 7.
[28] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1984), 14.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Gutiérrez, *We Drink From Our Own Wells,* 14.

A Theological Response to Poverty

Certainly there are factors that exist both within modern-day culture and the Church that create barriers to comprehending why a responsibility of care should be extended toward the poor and the marginalized. Church tradition, however, provides the means for understanding why care is a priority, and a responsibility in the life of a parish. At a very broad level of Church doctrine lies the belief of "*imago Dei*," or "image of God, which draws upon Genesis 1:27 and forms a basis of establishing that human life has value due to the equal dignity that is present within all of humanity. Within this broad context, the Second Vatican Council ("the Council") maintained that the Church has a mission to be a sacrament of salvation that illuminates and animates Jesus' ministry of care for human life in the world today. Subsequently, within the Church, members have a responsibility to be the animators of her mission by answering the call to create and form a community in which there exists mutual responsibility and solidarity, or kinship, amongst all her members.

Imago Dei

Scripture and Catholic social teaching are clear that there is dignity and equality for all of humanity because of the manner in which all are created. Furthermore, God manifests this dignity through the Incarnation by becoming human in the person of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the treatment of others in an oppressive manner ignores their human dignity which is an offense towards God.[31] Presently in the U.S., oppression exists in the undignified living conditions that the poor are forced to endure due to a lack of support from society. To combat this situation, humankind is called to find their way to a right relationship with God by treating the poor in a manner that is humane and dignified.

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[31] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis 1988), 165.

"So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27, *NRSV*).[32] Catholic social teaching draws upon this Scripture from Genesis to form the doctrine of *imago Dei*: the foundation of belief that because we are all made by God in God's image and likeness, human life is sacred and therefore has value.[33] As creations of God, humans are born from eternal love which imbues an intrinsic value that is absolute, and therefore, humans cannot be considered or treated as subservient to any world system.[34] Thus, there is equality among humans because God creates everyone with equal value. Value comes from God and therefore it is not measured by "nationality, race, sex, economic status, or any human accomplishments."[35] Equal value indicates that, despite any particular human attribute, humans are to treat each other with equal dignity.

Christ is made in the "image of the invisible God" through the Incarnation and therefore humanity is not suppressed but is transformed in the "perfect image of the Son."[36] Through the Incarnation, God concretely accompanies humanity and thereby manifests God's understanding of its dignity. Furthermore, through the life and example of Jesus Christ, God spreads His message of love for all of humanity and as a result we are able to witness an example of dignified treatment to others that knows no boundaries and that is extended to everyone. Throughout Scripture it is understood that we encounter and dignify God when we extend dignity to others, "…just as you did it to one of the least of these (you) did it to me (and) just as you did not do it to one of the least of these (you) did not do it to me" (Matthew 25: 40, 45). The

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[32] All Scripture quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

[33] United States Catholic Bishops, "Economic Justice for All," paragraph 28.

[34] International Theological Commission, "Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God," accessed May 27, 2015, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20040723_communion-stewardship_en.html, 2000-2002, paragraph 22 – 24.

[35] United States Catholic Bishops, "Economic Justice for All," paragraph 13.

[36] International Theological Commission, "Communion and Stewardship," paragraph 22.

Incarnation, therefore, is significant as it is the source of humanity's encounter with God's presence and where the mysteries of God's person are revealed in the actions of Jesus Christ. Theologian Yves Congar states that "the story of God's relations with his creation (is the story) of his ever more generous (presence) among his creatures."[37] God's presence reaches fullness when God became human and hence became more "universal and complete."[38]

God's presence to humanity is also both internal and universal, linking God's people together throughout the earth. God's internal presence within humanity is an integration of God's presence where it initially dwells in places of worship and then, as it extends to all, is "transferred to the heart of human history; it is a presence that embraces the whole person."[39] At the center of the internal and universal presence of God is Christ, who has no equal on earth and therefore transcends the particular and completes the universal presence of God.[40] Furthermore, within the Incarnation of Christ, the internal is made visible when God takes on a material form and becomes part of human history, a history that brings to the world the need for peace and justice within humanity.[41]

It is through the manifestation of the Incarnation, when "the Word became flesh, he came to dwell among us," that God has presence within each human being in the form of a living temple in which God dwells (John 1:14). God's presence is also referenced in the Gospel of John when Jesus states that he will rebuild the temple in three days, thus referring to himself as a "temple" of God (John 2:22). Therefore, through and since the Incarnation, every human is a

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[37] Yves Congar, *The Mystery of the Temple* (Westminster: Newman Press, 1962), ix, quoted in Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis 1988), 107.
[38] Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 107.
[39] Ibid, 109.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid., 109-110.

"living temple of God."[42] The Spirit, sent by the Father and the Son, dwells in all of humanity to carry the work of salvation to its fulfillment. By extension of the Spirit, all of humanity, not just the Christian community, is "God's temple" in which "God's spirit dwells" (1 Corinthians 3:16). Furthermore anyone who destroys the temple is destroying something of God's that is holy and therefore is of value.[43] In this sense, by dwelling in all humans, the Spirit reaches and affects a multitude of human relationships that are present in the concrete reality of humanity.[44] Christ's own words apply to all of humanity, "Those who love me will keep my word and my father will love them, and we will come to him and make our (dwelling) with them" (John 14: 2-3).

It is through the affirmation of this "inviolable dignity of the human person" that we are called to develop the common good on earth by creating social conditions that allow human persons "to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily."[45] Within a particular society goods exist that are not considered as individually owned, but are indivisible and most effectively used when they are shared by the whole community. By sharing and using these common goods with all members, a society fulfills its fundamental goal to work toward the good for all people and to be of service to human beings at all levels.[46] Therefore the human person "exists 'with' others and 'for' others," they do not find fulfillment in themselves as individuals.[47]

The dominant culture within the U.S. cultivates an image of the lifestyle of Hispanics as one that is somewhat uncivilized, thus preserving inside the U.S. a methodical practice of exclusion that attempts to justify the fear of threat from another culture that could do harm to the

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[42] Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 110.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid., 109.
[45] Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, "Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church," accessed Nov. 20, 2015, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_comp endio-dott-soc_en.html , 2005, paragraphs 107, 164.
[46] United States Catholic Bishops, "Economic Justice for All," paragraphs 164-165.
[47] Ibid., paragraph 165.

wellbeing of the citizens of the U.S.[48] This fear and threat of wellbeing is projected onto the presence of poor Latin American immigrants that live in the U.S. As a result these immigrants are not treated in a dignified manner as they are denied services that would help them reach their fulfillment. In short, the common goods of the community are not shared equitably with Latin American immigrants. Father Virgil Elizondo criticizes these prejudiced feelings as justifying a "quest for human purity."[49] This system of exclusion does not foster a universal presence of God. Likewise, those that harbor and promote an atmosphere of exclusion hardly portray themselves as a temple to God.

Christian faith is formed by the life and teachings of Christ. Therefore living as examples of Christ, we are called to become an image of God in the world. One such image of God is found within the parable of the Good Samaritan as we are asked, "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10: 29, 36-37). Father Gustavo Gutiérrez responds to this question by stating that it is the one who "*approached* the wounded man and *made him his neighbor*."[50] The neighbor is not the person we find in our everyday path of life; it is the person "in whose path I place myself, the one whom I approach and actively seek."[51] Boyle describes acts of compassion towards another as a "covenant between healer and wounded."[52] We exist with and for others, not for ourselves. This image of an interconnected life is not apt to breed a culture of indifference and individualism.

However, civic laws and community practices that result in oppression of the poor are grounded in an attitude of indifference and individualism which promotes care for oneself over

[48] Virgil Elizondo, *The Future is Mestizo: Life Where Cultures Meet,* (New York: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 1992)*,* 80.
[49] Elizondo, *The Future is Mestizo,* 80.
[50]Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation,* 113.
[51] Ibid.
[52]Gregory Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion*, (New York: Free Press, 2010), 77.

care for those that are considered as the "other." Laws that discourage care for undocumented immigrants often times affect the attitudes of a community by communicating that a lack of care is proper and rationalized. In this manner there is a profound disconnect between community practices and civic law that oppress Latin American immigrants in the U.S., and the Church's teachings which are "grounded in respect to the fundamental dignity of all human beings and ensured by defense of basic human rights, including the right to migrate."[53] The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops states that people have the "right to migrate to support themselves and their families" and "regardless of their legal status, migrants, like all human beings, possess inherent human dignity and that dignity should be respected."[54] Awareness of these teachings, together with a call to action, is to begin to accept the "other," such as people from the Soup Kitchen, like Alejandro and his family. Gutiérrez writes that, "Acceptance is the foundation of a communion among human persons."[55] A refusal to love is sinful as it is a rejection of fellowship and ultimately a rejection of the "other's" human existence.[56] Poverty is caused by ignoring and being indifferent to the suffering of another; it is an "expression of sin (and) a negation of love."[57] Likewise, withholding care for another, thus exacerbating poverty, is the same as refusing to care for another. Poverty is rooted in the "injustice of oppressors," meaning people are poor because they are victims of the beliefs, practices and omissions of a more dominant culture.

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[53] Carmen Nanko-Fernández, *Theologizing en Espanglish* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2010), 113.
[54] United States Catholic Bishops, "Strangers No Longer Together on the Journey of Hope," United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Inc. and Conferencia del Episcopado Mexicano, 2003, accessed Nov. 20, 2014, http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/immigration/strangers-no-longer-together-on-the-journey-of-hope.cfm, paragraphs 28, 38.
[55] Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 113.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid., 168.

Theologian Justo González cautions us to not confuse sin with crime, "Not all that is legal is exempt from sin."[58] Even though U.S. laws allow citizens to put their own care ahead of care for others, Scripture supports and confirms that this action is sinful as it denies love and care for the other.[59] Jesus set the example of proper care for others by behaving in right relationship, no matter how painful or difficult; he always acted on behalf of the "other" even when it led to his crucifixion. Therefore, there are few reasons that rationalize the presence of poverty because accepting poverty as the status quo is not compatible with creating the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom of love and inclusion.[60] Instead, on an ongoing basis, Christians are called to commit to the poor who are the privileged members of the Kingdom of God. To act otherwise is to ignore the Christian message.[61]

Christian expectations regarding a dignified behavior towards one another should be "grounded in a shared humanity" which flows from being jointly created in the divine image of God; this is the foundation of the need for ethical behavior to others.[62] Theologian Carmen Nanko-Fernández states that humans belong to each other in a multitude of ways, including culturally, politically and religiously. To encourage encounter and engagement with others we should not seek "sameness," nor should we "problematize" the others differences, but instead we should find our "points of intersection."[63] By seeking the ways that we connect, we respect our differences, our diversity and the dignity of others: We acknowledge the diverse image of God that our world represents.

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[58] Justo González, *Mañana* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 135.
[59] Ibid., 136-137.
[60] Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation,* 168.
[61] Ibid.*,* xxxiii.
[62] Nanko-Fernández, *Theologizing en Espanglish*, 19.
[63] Ibid., 10, 19.

The Church as a Sacrament of Salvation

The Council brought about changes within the Church that empowered her to take a public stand as an advocate for the dignity of the human person. Journalist Peter Steinfels describes these changes as empowering the Church with the ability to be a "powerful and moral force in a society with fewer and fewer moral authorities."[64] Not surprisingly, her stand on moral issues, such as policies that affect the poor, often collide with the social and cultural norms of a society that has an ethos of individualism. It is an ethos that does not favor people that are poor and marginalized. By taking a public stand on moral issues, the Church communicates a need to align human action with an understanding of the value of life. Her hope is to be a bridge linking diverse races and classes such as "suburban neighborhoods and inner city ghettoes."[65] In this manner the Church "exists not for its own sake but to be the witness, the instrument and the locus of this Spirit-filled sharing in divine glory."[66]

The Council indicated a desire for the Church to be an involved presence in the modern world by stepping outside of her doors and involving herself in the world's tragedies and triumphs, secure in the knowledge that humanity is sustained by God's love, (*Gaudiem et Spes*, 2). The Council, concerned about the world's challenges, believes in the hope that Christ can interject into the world. The hope of Christ creates for all people a possibility of imagining a world that is reconstituted in the image of God's design so that they can reach their fulfillment. As a creator of hope, this image of Christ is of one who came to serve and not to sit in judgment. Likewise, as witness to the compassion of Christ, the Church also exists today to serve and to not judge. In this respect, the Church can facilitate humankind's quest for fulfillment by standing in

[64] Peter Steinfels, *A People Adrift: The Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2003), 2.
[65] Steinfels, *A People Adrift*, 3,
[66] Ibid., 3, 13.

solidarity with them and in conversation about their challenges (GS 3). This relationship with

humankind allows the Church to be of optimal assistance to humankind so that they are able to

understand their destiny and be renewed by this knowledge (GS 3). The relationship also affirms

that there is dignity and worth in all people.

One of the changes brought about by the Council was a shift in Church focus away from

maintaining, as her primary role, the facilitation of the Christian journey to eternal life. Instead,

the Church assumed a role that emphasizes the importance of bearing witness to God's love and

compassion by endeavoring to bring about a culture of justice and healing in the world.[67] The

Council's message is that the "here and now" of the world is filled with God's presence and is

not just a place to prepare for eternity. As articulated through Council documents, the Church has

a role to help facilitate and manifest God's presence in the world. In the first chapter of *Lumen*

Gentium the Council states that, "the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and

instrument of a very close knit union with God and of unity of the whole human race," (*Lumen*

Gentium 1). The Council communicates that the Church's institutional structure is not the "end"

or her sole source of meaning as "Church." Instead her institutional structure is the means to

access her spiritual dimensions that unite God with the human race.

In determining that the Church is a sacrament, theologians on the Council looked beyond

the seven sacraments to give theological consideration to the term "sacrament" in order to

consider its nature and connection between the Church and Jesus' humanity.[68] The Council

looked to the work of theologian Karl Rahner who determined that grace is present in the world

by "reason of God's self-communication" that occurred in the "act of creation, when human

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[67] Steinfels, *A People Adrift*, 74.
[68] Kenan Osbourne, Sacramental Theology (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 9.

beings were already called to that fullness of divine communication."[69] Grace is "made concrete

and is perfected in Jesus Christ as the embodied presence of God in the world."[70] The grace of

God does not come down from on high; it is permanently present in the world in a tangible form,

established as the flesh of Christ as part of the world and humanity.[71] Christ, by his historical

existence, "is both the reality and the sign… of the redemptive grace of God" established and

manifested in the world.[72] Rahner claimed that Christ, as the symbolic presence of God's grace

in the world, is the first sign or the "primal" sacrament of God's love, and that in the world of

God, this is a sign that God's irrevocable mercy cannot be annulled.[73] The Church in Christ is

also a sign, or sacrament, of that same grace and therefore the Church, as the "fundamental"

sacrament, is the continuation or visible sign, or presence, of God's salvation through Christ.[74]

The Church, as a sacrament in Christ, is a sign that calls to mind the love of God and His gift of

grace for all humankind. Christ as the "first" sacrament is the visible sign of the invisible God,

and the Church as a sacrament is the visible sign of the invisible Christ.[75] Furthermore, the

Church as a sacrament acknowledges her institution, or visible structure, and balances this

understanding with a "deeper, invisible reality of God's presence in the community."[76]

As a sacrament of Christ, the Church is also an instrument for the unity of the whole

human race, or a universal sacrament of salvation. The Council established that "God gathered

together as one all those who in faith look upon Jesus as the author of salvation and the source of

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[69] Michael A. Fahey, "Church," in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, 2nd ed., ed. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 481.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Karl Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments*, trans. By W. J. O'Hara, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), 15.

[72] Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments,* 15.

[73] Ibid., 18.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Edward P. Hahnenberg, *A Concise Guide to the Documents of Vatican II* (Cincinnati: Francsican Media, 2007), 43.

[76] Ibid.

unity and peace, and established them as the Church that for each and all it may be the visible

sacrament of this saving unity," (LG 9). The Council specifically addressed two areas within this

element that include the Church and her members. The first element is that the Church has a

mission to unite the world with courage and conviction in a manner that provides hope and

salvation for all of humankind. Secondly, her members are included in her call to unity to be a

"living example of the unity that God desires for the entire human race."[77]

By addressing the first element, the Council states that the Church has a mission to help

provide salvation for all humankind, thus taking on the role as a universal sacrament of salvation:

"…He sent His life-giving Spirit upon His disciples and through Him has established His Body

which is the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation," (LG 48). The Church's mission

"has a single intention: that God's kingdom may come, and that the salvation of the whole

human race may come to pass. For every benefit which the People of God…can offer to the

human family stems from the fact that the Church is the 'universal sacrament of salvation,'" (GS

45).

The Church was "sent into the world to transform it from within" and her mission is to

"heal and elevate the dignity of the human person, to strengthen human society, and to help

humanity discover the deeper meaning of their lives."[78] Council documents further state that,

"Pursuing the saving purpose which is proper to her, the Church does not only communicate

divine life to men but in some way casts the reflected light of that life over the entire earth, most

of all by its healing and elevating impact on the dignity of the person, by the way in which it

strengthens the seams of human society and imbues the everyday activity of men with a deeper

meaning and importance. Thus …the Church believes she can contribute greatly toward making

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[77] Richard Gaillardetz, *Keys to the Council: Unlocking the Teaching of Vatican II*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2012), 93.

[78] Gaillardetz, *Keys to the Council,* 93.

the family of man…more human," (GS 40). This section establishes the deep scope of the

Church's mission as a means to bring dignity to the world in a pervasive way that affects societal

and cultural norms.

The Council addressed the second element by stating that there is a need for unity

amongst the Church and all of humankind so that together both can engage in the world, stating

that it is the mission of the Church to be an instrument of a united humanity, "The Church is a

sign of communion with God and of unity with the entire human race," (LG 1). The Church

"stands forth as a sign of that brotherliness which allows honest dialogue and invigorates it," (GS

92) so that she "will be a lasting and sure seed of unity, hope, and salvation for the whole human

race," (LG 9). Unity within the Church extends to the Christian community as well, "…the

Church which is the 'sacrament of unity', namely, (is) the holy people united," (*Sacrosanctum*

Concilium 2). Furthermore, "the union of the human family is greatly fortified and fulfilled by

the unity, founded on Christ, of the family of God's sons," (GS 42). All of humankind is united

by their shared human elements and act in solidarity with one another, "The joys and the hopes,

the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor…these are the

joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. For theirs is a community

composed of men. United in Christ, they …have welcomed the news of salvation that is meant

for every man,"(GS 1).[79]

The Council acknowledges that the Church is not the kingdom of God and is not yet

perfected, but "will attain its full perfection only in the glory of heaven," (LG 48). During these

"in-between times" humankind exists and waits for God's plan that will reconcile them with

Christ. It is in this manner that the Church has a saving and eschatological nature which supports

her role as a sacrament of salvation in the world, "He sent His life-giving Spirit upon His

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[79] Gaillardetz, *Keys to the Council*, 91.

disciples and through Him has established His body which is the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation. He is continually active in the world that He might lead men to the Church and through it join them to Himself and that he might make them partakers of His glorious life…," (LG 48).

The Council set forth her mission to provide salvation for all. As one, holy and united people, humankind is called to work toward the salvation of the world. They are not "saved as individuals, but as members of a 'holy people.'"[80]. Once united the people within the Church carry out her mission of salvation in the world, "God has…established the church, that it may be for each and everyone the visible sacrament of this saving unity," (LG 9).

As the people within the Church work together within the saving grace of God they experience relationships that are transformed. By this transformation they are reconciled with God and with one another and thus, live in greater harmony within the world. The Council states that, "God…does not make men holy and save them as mere individuals, without bond or link between one another. Rather has it pleased Him to bring men together as one people, a people which acknowledges Him in truth and serves Him in holiness," (LG 9).

The Christian community comes together and through their daily lives are witnesses to all as a living example of Christ, a people that respect the dignity of all persons, work "for a just share of the earth's resources," challenge "violence and injustice" and promote peace.[81] The Council states, "Just as Christ carried out the work of redemption in poverty and oppression, so the church is called to follow the same path if it is to communicate the fruits of salvation to humanity," (LG 8). Humankind becomes a reflection of God's love for others when they live a life of awareness and in service to others. When they embrace the world, humanity "reveals the

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[80] Gaillardetz, *Keys to the Council*, 53.
[81] Ibid.

loving rule of God in history."[82] As a universal sacrament of salvation, the Church must be the sign of "what has already been achieved in Christ, to what is happening through him at the present time and to what must still be achieved in the future."[83] She must be a reflection of the dynamic process of salvation. A life that is acted out of awareness for others becomes a reflection "of the very love of God for others."[84] The self-understanding of the Church as a universal sacrament of salvation is an acknowledgment that she has a mission in the world.

In Solidarity with the Poor

The Council envisioned a world in which people are brought together and are united in the mission to bring salvation to the world in order to begin to create the Kingdom of God on earth. The Church's vision for unity collides with the vision of modern-day cultures that contain social structures that engender and privilege those with a more stable lifestyle. Social structures that privilege the dominant culture seem to be at the root of the Texas court battle against the extension of DACA and DAPA implementation. The effect of these structures often create and exacerbate situations of injustice for those that experience poverty. God, though, has a preferential option for the poor and God's presence is revealed through their suffering. Therefore, in order to become an extension of the Church and to "see" God, Christians are called to join in authentic solidarity with the poor, to become God's hands, and act to alleviate the living conditions of those that are oppressed.

Volunteers within the Soup Kitchen that act to address the needs of guests, and offer them appropriate assistance, understand God's preferential option for the poor. Bianca too understands the importance of creating time in her busy schedule to help others so that they will

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[82] Jan Groot, "The Church as a Sacrament of the World," in *The Sacraments in General: A New Perspective,* ed. Edward Schillebeeckx (New York: Paulist Press, 1967), 54.
[83] Ibid., 55.
[84] Gaillardetz, *Keys to the Council*, 53.

have a chance to break out of poverty. Gutiérrez explains that poverty is evil and is something

that God does not want because it causes people to live in inhumane conditions. Therefore, "as

individuals and as a nation," we are all called "to make a fundamental 'option for the poor.'"[85] A

preferential option for the poor gives the poor priority when addressing needs in society and

therefore they are the first in society with whom we should express our solidarity. [86] Theologian

Roberto Goizueta offers insight into God's intent of this preference. He explains that because

God has love for all that is "gratuitous and universal," meaning that it is given to all freely and

equally, and because this love is manifested throughout history where we see "injustice, conflict

and division, …then God's love must take sides with the victims" of these historical injustices.[87]

For God to remain neutral to the suffering of someone who is powerless is to take the side of the

preferenced group, implicitly acknowledging their role of dominance, thus allowing the victim to

feel abandoned. For God to give preference to the poor is to say that God loves equally because

even a neutral position about the poor is to suggest that "God's voice" sides with "established

power structures."[88] Goizueta states that implicit within this belief is the understanding that if

"God is present preferentially among the poor, we can only know God if we place ourselves

there too."[89] Therefore, in order for us to know God, we must prefer the poor by being a voice

for the voiceless, defending the defenseless and "assess life styles, policies, and social

institutions in terms of their impact on the poor."[90]

Goizueta's claim addresses the downside of practices in the U.S. and the Church that can

be categorized as behaving in a manner of indifference or individualism. Goizueta says that an

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[85] United States Catholic Bishops, "Economic Justice for All," paragraph 87.
[86] Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, xxv.
[87] Roberto Goizueta, *Caminemos Con Jesús* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995), 175-176.
[88] Ibid., 177.
[89] Ibid.
[90] United States Catholic Bishops, "Economic Justice for All," vii, paragraph 16.

option for the poor reveals to all the communal nature of humans and exposes us to the injustice that is present in the world. He explains that the choice we have is not whether to accompany the poor but whether we do so "self-consciously and intentionally" because the poor are with us and are ever present in society.[91] When the poor are not preferenced everyone suffers consequences, even the privileged who experience fears of losing their wealth and security to various forms of redistribution. Therefore the need to "enslave others" by withholding assistance invariably creates "generalized fear and anxiety" that enslaves everyone.[92] Elizondo agrees that "fear of the other" creates a threat in society which exacerbates a model of segregation and in order to be "faithful to our creator" we must fight "unceasingly for desegregation."[93]

Catholic social teaching states that there are minimum conditions that all humanity must have access to in order for society to exist as a community; these conditions create "empowerments that call for positive actions…by society.[94] Included in this teaching, is the right to education as a means to become an active member of society.[95] Study results show that poverty levels drop as education increases and therefore education can serve as a means of breaking the cycle of poverty.[96] However, many of the poor do not have access to the help they need to successfully navigate society, including access to a higher education. Bianca struggled alone to complete her college applications; access to a mentor would have enabled her to more easily realize her goal of higher education. Someone less motivated could have become frustrated with the enrollment process and as a result may have abandoned this dream. Social support, however, is embedded into one's network and includes support which is outside of one's

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[91] Goizueta, *Caminemos Con Jesús,* 178.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Elizondo, *The Future is Mestizo*, 56.
[94] United States Catholic Bishops, "Economic Justice for All," paragraph 81.
[95] Ibid., paragraphs 81-82.
[96] Danziger, "State of the Union," 16.

family. For youth to successfully navigate a variety of challenges both in the world and in the

academic rigors of school they need access to such networks that will allow them active

mentorship with a non-parent mentor.[97] In addition to providing support and guidance, mentors

model methods of communication that assist in navigating through social networks. This type of

navigation is necessary in order to have profound impact on a young person's social mobility.[98]

Unfortunately, many youth in lower-income backgrounds do not ordinarily experience this

support in their life. Youth require a mentor that will empower them and give them access to

information that will provide the means to reap transformative support that will allow them

access to the resources necessary to achieve their goals.[99] Furthermore, when society creates

barriers to education by not funding tuition assistance or providing help in completing a college

application, ultimately it creates barriers in the work force which can silence a voice. Society

benefits from the diverse voices that are heard when underprivileged youth are allowed access to

higher education because diversity "has the capacity to undermine the power and exclusion built

into educational systems."[100] The power of education allows another voice to be heard, one that

understands poverty and understands the struggle to escape it. On the other hand systems that

privilege the dominant class "survive owing to practices that guarantee that only a select few will

gain access to the markers of such privilege."[101]

  The Christian response to poverty is one of an authentic community that stands in

solidarity with the poor and that protests the conditions in which they suffer.[102] The Trinity is the

example of a true relationship and therefore it sets up the ideal model for the solidarity that

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[97] Ricardo D. Stanton-Salazar, "A Social Capital Framework for the Study of Institutional Agents and Their Role in the Empowerment of Low-status Students and Youth," *Youth & Society* 43, no. 3 (2011): 1069.

[98] Stanton-Salazar, "A Social Capital Framework for the Study of Institutional Agents," 1070 -1071.

[99] Ibid., 1091.

[100] Cecilia González-Andrieu,"The Good of Education: Accessibility, Economy, Class and Power," unpublished article, 2014, 9.

[101] González-Andrieu,"The Good of Education," 13.

[102] Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation,* 118.

should exist in a community. The Trinity embodies a life of ultimate sharing in which "three Divine Persons share everything in such a way that there are not three gods but only one God."[103] The Trinity is God's response to God's people, offering them an example of life in community and beseeching humanity to live life as one. González states that the Trinity "affirms belief in a God whose essence is sharing" and is an example of what a "sharing love" looks like.[104] A life that does not include sharing does not include God, likewise a life that does not share power as the Trinity does, also does not include God. This example extends to social institutions, including churches, meaning that God is present where sharing love is manifested.[105]

Gutiérrez states that in the Gospel of Luke, the Samaritan tended to the sick man on the roadside not out of "religious obligation, but because 'his heart was melting,' because his love for that man was made flesh in him."[106] In contrast, a "horizontalist" tendency toward care is one that is given solely out of duty, and not out of love. This is a tendency that can be considered individualized action because it is focused on one's own actions and not focused on the true love with the other. This behavior displays an indifference to the poor and as empty charity is not indicative of God's love for humanity. Genuine love of God is revealed only by an authentic and "concrete approach to human persons."[107] Buddhist author Pema Chodron calls this compassion that, at its "truest measure lies not in our service to those on the margins, but in our willingness to see ourselves in kinship with them."[108]

St. Francis exemplified the true meaning of solidarity and kinship with the poor by embracing a radical poverty which led him to experience the joy of life with God. Assuming a

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[103] González, *Mañana*, 114.
[104] Ibid., 115.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 114.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart*, 71.

life of poverty allowed him to experience a life of unity and fraternity with the poor in which he was able to truly see the "fragility of human nature and the need for interdependence."[109] He abandoned the security of his life to experience a life of vulnerability and in return was able to understand the vulnerability of the poor.[110] St. Francis responded to a world of individualism by choosing to be in community with the poor and to help create the "reality of the Incarnation, the goodness of God in creation and the dignity of the human person."[111] He underwent a profound conversion in his life, one that was a life in Christ, which in turn reflected his decision to live in solidarity with the poor.

St. Francis was influenced by the humility displayed by God, in the life of Jesus: God who took on human form and lived a life of service to the under-privileged. St. Francis imitated the example of Jesus, one of a "model human being," who set an example that sought "fullness of life with God" in daily life.[112] He understood that Jesus' example illuminated for all of humanity the gift that was a life with God. Furthermore, embracing poverty led St. Francis to be disinterested in things, creating a detachment that grew into a liberating love for humanity. This form of detachment represents the antithesis of consumerism, that of replacing things with relationships, and instead creates human fraternity. He viewed and embraced poverty as an "evangelical way of being" totally available as a minority, in which he put himself last in order to avoid any expression of power. [113] This was the spirit that moved St. Francis to embrace the

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[109] Ilia Delio, O.S.F., *Franciscan Identity and Postmodern Culture*, Kathleen Warren, ed. (New York: The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure University, 2003), 19.

[110] Cecilia González-Andrieu, *Bridge to Wonder*: *Art as a Gospel of Beauty* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012), 156, 160.

[111] Delio, O.S.F., *Franciscan Identity,* 19.

[112] Dawn M. Nothwehr, O.S.F., *The Franciscan View of the Human Person: Some Central Elements* (St. Bonaventure: The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure University, 2005), 7.

[113] Leonardo Boff, *Saint Francis: A Model for Human Liberation* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1982), 75

leper. He understood the meaning of "*imago Dei*," seeing beauty and dignity which all humans bear in the image of God.

Much like St. Francis' quest for solidarity with the poor many years ago, there is an appreciation of *lo cotidiano*, or the daily life of poverty when we come to know the Alejandros and Biancas of the world and the details of why they live a daily life of struggle. Nanko-Fernández agrees that engaging in the "messiness" of the "other's" daily living empowers us to "seek the transformation of injustice" in both public and domestic arenas.[114] In knowing the poor we come to understand how poverty can be compared to death: it means that intelligent young adults will most likely be denied the services and assistance that they need to survive, they will not be able to exercise their right to an education due to a lack of mentors to help them navigate the education system, nor will they be able to maneuver alone through the process of obtaining financial aid. Subsequently then, neither will they be adequately qualified to gain fruitful employment, which means that they will be locked into the cycle of poverty in which they currently reside. Nanko-Fernández says that when we enter the world of the poor, we take the first steps toward addressing their problems and finding them assistance. It is an entrance that is one of constancy and where we begin to understand the finer details of what is needed to reverse their trend of poverty.

Theologian Cecilia González-Andrieu agrees that there is power in accompanying those who are marginalized. She explains, though, that the relationship is cultivated when we adopt an attitude of mutuality by creating vulnerability within ourselves; it is then that we are able to form relationships and give one another unconditional love.[115] When we enter the world of another we give up our sense of control, which in actuality is only our sense of privilege. An attitude of

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[114] Nanko-Fernández, *Theologizing en Espanglish*, 84.
[115] González-Andrieu, *Bridge to Wonder*, 156.

vulnerability is counter to the practices of the present postmodern world which rewards the dominant culture for its attitudes of indifference and individualism, attitudes which marginalize those who cannot measure up to the standards that this culture sets. When we become vulnerable and embrace the stories of Alejandro and Bianca we begin a relationship with them, celebrating the beauty and uniqueness in others in a manner that fosters their dignity and erases our artificial boundaries.[116] We become like Christ who gave up his freedom and control for our freedom and life. Vulnerability in the manner of Christ becomes a power of choice and freedom that imbues both our everyday and spiritual lives.[117]

Modern-day culture, with its focus on individualism and indifference to the "other," is called to conversion in order to transform its attitude and change its status quo into a life that is lived in solidarity and kinship with the "other." Such a new cultural existence is called *mestizaje* by Elizondo, a universal place in which no boundaries exist and where all differences are absorbed.[118] In other words, new culture within humanity is created. Elizondo refers to it as the "way of Jesus of Nazareth," and following his path and example will lead us to absolute salvation that begins today in the world, away from the death of individualism and poverty to a life of kinship with one another.[119] Such a world envelopes the spirit of *imago Dei*: a spirit in Christ that dwells in us to "build up the bonds of solidarity among all persons until that day in which union is brought to perfection in the Kingdom of God."[120]

Responding to Poverty

Based upon the study by the Stanford Center on Poverty & Equality, completion of school at a higher level of education is a means to reduce poverty levels and reverse its cycle

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[116] González-Andrieu, *Bridge to Wonder*, 157-158.
[117] Ibid., 160.
[118] Elizondo, *The Future is Mestizo*, 17.
[119] Ibid., 71.
[120] United States Catholic Bishops, "Economic Justice for All," 16, paragraph 64.

amongst future generations of people. Higher education allows someone to work at a higher and more skilled level because it opens access to the type of jobs that pay higher wages. These jobs enable people to provide a better life for themselves. Access to a college degree allows someone the ability to plan and control their own life, a life that can be fulfilling and dignified.

Students who desire to expand their potential for a fulfilling and dignified life often face roadblocks when navigating an education path that is new to them and their families. The roadblocks are varied and include problems in completing the entry applications similar to what Bianca encountered and the discouragement that Alejandro faced by juggling responsibilities of home, work and school. These barriers to attaining higher education are in addition to the financial and immigration worries that these students have to face alone.

Students who decide to navigate through the college education system would benefit from the guidance and support of a mentor. A mentor would give them a better chance of successfully completing a college degree. Mentors can help poor students because they can draw on their own experience of the college system including how to correctly complete an application and how to choose the best school to suit particular academic needs. Mentors can also serve as a cheerleader to help encourage students to continue their studies when their obligations become overwhelming.

Parishes in more affluent areas are more apt to be a church home to the very people who could provide mentoring and guidance to poor students. These parishioners hold a wide variety of degrees from many different schools. They have navigated the entire college process from enrollment and financing to the completion of a course of study. These parishioners have the means to provide a helpful and mentoring connection with the poor students by being in solidarity with them as the students strive to achieve their goal of college education.

A mentoring program that includes college educated parishioners and students who desire

a college education is what Nanko-Fernandez describes as an encounter that consists of people's

"points of intersection."[121] It is a point where English speaking parishioners would have the

opportunity to connect and integrate with people from another ethnic and socio-economic

culture. This encounter is a starting point for people in higher-income communities to understand

the debilitating effects of poverty and the support that is needed to help people overcome

challenges that create barriers to living a dignified life. Boyle would describe the encounter

between these two groups as one that is a witness to the belief that all lives matter.[122]

When relationships are formed amongst the participants of a mentoring program, it opens

the possibility of kinship between two once separate groups of people. This has the possibility of

expanding the relationships to include other members in the communities. For instance, through

the mentoring process, a mentor may come to know the student's family and vice versa. Thus

there is the possibility for forming a new relationship between both families; one that becomes

both familiar and mutual in which triumphs and challenges are shared. A mentoring program has

the possibility of creating a community of kinship.

Within a mentoring program that involves students, the natural method for matching

them with mentors would be to pair mentors and students that have common professional

interests or common university affiliations. However, a successful program entails much more

than just pairing people according to their common interests. Mentors are a form of ministers and

need the same types of training. The mentors within this type of program should be carefully

selected and trained to provide sensitivity and guidance in identifying the needs of the students.

Mentors must be able to understand the vulnerability that is needed from them so that they can

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[121] Nanko-Fernandez, *Theologizing en Espanglish*, 19.
[122] Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart*, xiii.

be comfortable entering into an unfamiliar world with those from another culture. This is to ensure that one's own cultural norms are not imposed upon the students and to help form a relationship that respects the nuances of both cultures.

A period of mentor training therefore must proceed commencement of the mentoring program. Richard Osmer and Richard Gula provide guidance for ministers that is also applicable to mentors and can help them understand how to most effectively interact with those that they seek to assist. The information that both authors provide can be used as a foundation to create a training program for mentors. The training program should be conducted by a formation team that is comprised of church members who regularly train ministers, people that are experienced with social work and people that are familiar with the students who need assistance. This team approach is used to help ensure that all mentors have the appropriate skills and information needed to be effective mentors. Following the mentor training session, this formation team will evaluate the readiness and ability of mentors to help students. The evaluation process will also help to provide a means for partnering mentors with students.

Mentors and students, once paired, will meet at a communal location near the students' community. The Bread of Life Soup Kitchen can provide this type of familiar and comfortable meeting place for the students. Frequency of meetings will vary according to student needs. In the early stages of the mentorship, time will need to be spent establishing trust between the student and the mentor. In addition, more time will need to be spent during college application processes and school discernment processes. Over time as the relationship develops, the student and mentor can communicate in person and by phone. A successful program is one in which the pairings of students and mentors create a large community of kinship with one another. In this

manner the students can benefit from the support from each other and in time help to mentor

younger students.

In planning and creating mentor training, Osmer offers a process for successful training.

He advocates for minister development that envelops a "spirituality of presence" in which

ministers relate to others with an attitude that is open, attentive and prayerful.[123] Behaving in this

manner helps to open the possibility for creating relationships that honors that all individuals are

unique. These types of relationships recognize that there are certain nuances that occur within the

details of another's life- life's *lo cotidiano* and nuances for which the mentor has no previous

context. Within the spirituality of presence, the mentor is called to engage in active listening to

gain context. This involves listening in a non-judgmental manner that is perceptive to the

suffering of others.[124] Listening to others in this active manner provides a compassionate ear to

their suffering and acknowledges the imago Dei in the person to whom we minister. It is a means

to engage another in an atmosphere of mutual support and care.[125] In order to truly assist the

students, mentors must have an awareness of the situations that are present in their lives.

Otherwise, they will not be able to attend to the uniqueness of their situation and they will be

limited in the extent of support they can provide.

The mentor formation program should also include access to research information on

issues that concern poverty and immigration in the U.S. Osmer supports this type of action and

recognizes that ministers can deepen the listening activity by accessing research into particular

situations that affect the student. Research can allow an understanding of particular situations

that the poor student might reasonably encounter which can lead the mentor to a deeper

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[123] Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 34.
[124] Osmer, *Practical Theology,* 34.
[125] Ibid*.,* 35.

understanding of what is happening in the student's life. Depth in understanding is considered to

be a genuine spirituality of presence. This level of understanding into the student's conditions

can add a dimension of care which can lead to more intentional guidance.[126] For example,

research into the social conditions of the poor can lead a mentor to understand the pervasiveness

of hunger and sub-par living conditions for the students they mentor. Therefore, the mentor may

have better insight into the depth of frustration that exists as a result of an episode that a student

relays to them. Osmer notes that obstacles exist which prohibit full understanding by a mentor

and can create a shadow to the mentor's ability to attend to the students. Therefore the mentor

must be aware of their own limitations so that the appropriate skills can be developed.[127]

Richard Gula provides guidance for both the emotional and spiritual development of

ministers. Mentorship, as a form of ministry, is highly relational and therefor ministers must be

developed emotionally so that they can appropriately respond to students in order to foster a

trusting relationship. Gula advises that those that are "emotionally tone deaf, rigid, or distant"

should not be accepted into ministry.[128] This guideline is also true in the situation of a

mentorship program. Students already face discouraging and judgmental behavior from society

and will not be helped by having the behavior reinforced in a mentoring relationship. Therefore

mentors should be emotionally developed to that they are self-disciplined and are able to control

their impulses. Mentors must possess a self-awareness that will help them to be attuned to the

emotional needs that may be present in the narratives of the students and they must be open in a

manner that is hospitable and not defensive. A mentorship situation calls for an atmosphere of

empathy in which they understand how the students feels and in which they respect any

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[126] Osmer, *Practical Theology,* 39.
[127] Ibid., 40.
[128] Richard Gula, *Just Ministry: Professional Ethics for Pastoral Ministers* (New York: Paulist Press, 2010), 76.

differences that arise between their cultures. Gula sees empathy as the "root of caring and compassion."[129] This calls for the mentor to put aside their own desires and to recognize their own emotional reactions so that the student is treated with integrity in a manner that is collaborative and productive.

Spiritual practices can offer mentors ways to help them form their character. Gula recommends praying through a deep reading of scripture as a means to hone the mentor's perspective and to illuminate God's point of view about a situation. For example, reflection on the parable of the Good Samaritan can help the mentor understand the meaning of how to be neighbor to those that are not directly in one's community. The reflection includes the mentor's observation of their own emotions that they experience from this exercise and how their thoughts about neighbors are affected by the parable. This reflection can help the minister focus on the issues that are present in the life of the student. Gula also recommends prayers of intercessions as a means to strengthen the mentor's ability to experience solidarity, empathy and compassion.[130] Participation in the Eucharist with their church community also assists the mentor in strengthening their religious identity and reinforcing an aesthetic of communion with others. These practices help to tie the mentor back to their larger Christian community and reinforces that their role of mentor is service in the example of Jesus Christ.

Mentors, and the church communities that support them, preference the poor by serving in a capacity of compassion that begins to erase the current societal tendency toward actions that are individualistic and indifferent. The relationships that are created with students who are in need of support, start a process that forms connections and blends different cultures. This helps to creates *mestizaje* which erases some of the differences that society uses to define them. The

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[129] Gula, *Just Ministry,* 76.
[130] Ibid*.,* 77.

relationships between the church community, mentors and students helps to create a culture of solidarity and kinship that begins to create the Kingdom of God in today's world. As a church community, these actions create a sacrament of salvation that communicates that all people are formed equally in the image of God. These communities create an understanding of the expansiveness of God's love and acceptance for all people.

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