Shifting Conceptions of Social Justice in Faith-Based Care Workers as a Result of the Mission Year Program

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SHIFTING CONCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN FAITH-BASED CARE WORKERS AS A RESULT OF THE MISSION YEAR PROGRAM

By

TRACI DAHL

Under the Direction of Katherine B. Hankins

ABSTRACT

As provision of social services is increasingly handled by the non-profit sector, specifically through faith-based organizations (FBO's), current scholarship has suggests that FBOs have the possibility to either reinforce neoliberal ideology or progress social justice. This study provides an examination of the shift in conceptions of justice for participants in the Mission Year program, an FBO program naming justice as a goal. For the participants, this experience creates a new understanding of the causes of poverty, injustice and American culture which I name 'justice as knowing.' This understanding culminated within participants a desire to “live out justice” as ‘intentional neighbors’ by relocating to a high-poverty neighborhood, reconciling racial relations by building relationships, and contributing to a redistribution of wealth by investing resources in a high-poverty neighborhood. I call this action ‘justice as doing.’ Participants shift from liberal-based notions justice, rooted in liberalism, toward more equity-based conceptions of justice as fairness.

INDEX WORDS: Intentional neighbor, Mission Year, Social justice, Faith-based organizations
SHifting Conceptions of Social Justice in faith-based Care Workers as a result of the Mission Year Program

By

Traci Dahl

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2012
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December 2012
DEDICATION

I am so very grateful to my parents for a lifetime of never standing in my way, letting me always be myself and loving me for exactly who I am. I would rather have had no other company in these trenches than Gio Cosentino, Ryan Lawson, Cheryl Nye, Sarah Heck, Tyler Harris, Craig Skelton, Paul Foster, Karla Ilic, and Emily Furstch. I would like to thank God for gathering the wind in his fists. I would like to admonish my kitty for distracting me with cuteness. I am especially grateful to Shaye Petty, Misty & David Johnson and the Salter Klan, for carrying me through – thank you. I owe a great deal to Netflix (HBO and Showtime, that is) and tasty tasty IPA’s. A special thanks to John Allensworth for turning me on to geography and for retiring, because that party was epic. Finally, I’d like to thank ragtime, dixieland jazz and swing for continual renewal of spirit. Beer.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Katherine Hankins for her patience, kindness, encouragement, and belief in a simple truck driver. I would also like to express my gratitude to Katherine and Kate Derickson for giving me new eyes. Thank you to Leslie Edwards for her willingness to journey an unfamiliar path with me. A special thanks to Cheryl Nye, Susan Morrell, Cheryl Case, Michael Husebo, Dee Jordan and Mechelle Puckett for their support, help, and wisdom on this project. Finally, I would like to thank Tia, Basirat, and Jack – we all know that without them the entire building (parking deck, whatever) would crumble to the ground.
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1 INTRODUCTION

Since gaining a better understanding of the political, economic, and social processes that have contributed to poverty and decline in American cities, I have taken great interest in social processes that hold potential for creating more just outcomes. The faith-based organization (FBO) Mission Year gained my attention because it operates in high-poverty urban neighborhoods and names social justice as one of its goals. The study of FBOs is of particular interest in the social sciences because cities are increasingly adopting neoliberal economic policies which exacerbate poverty while shifting welfare services into the non-profit sector, specifically toward FBOs (Cnaan and Boddie 2002, Defillipis 2004). This is accomplished because neoliberalism, which will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter, is an economic philosophy that creates partnerships between private business and government which (1) utilize public dollars for speculative market ventures aimed at economic growth, and (2) privatize government services. In brief, neoliberal economic policies advantage already well off investors and business leaders while disadvantaging the poor through the cutting of social services (Harvey 1989, Peck and Tickell 2002).

Urban neoliberal policies have instigated urban politics scholars to denounce policies that favor downtown businesses, tourist facilities and stadiums while discounting neighborhood needs like schools and labor intensive industries (Fainstein 2010). These criticisms, according to urban planning scholar Susan Fainstein,

Have implied a model of the just city – that is, a city in which public investment and regulation would produce equitable outcomes rather than support those already well off. Our knowledge of what constitutes injustice is virtually instinctive – it consists of actions that disadvantage those who already have less or who are excluded from entitlements enjoyed by others who are no more deserving. (Fainstein 2010: 3)

Social justice can be viewed as actions that culminate into equitable outcomes, making disadvantaging and excluding those who have less unjust. Since poverty can be linked to unjust policies that disad-
vantage people, it is a justice issue. As faith-based organizations are increasingly shouldering the burden of poverty, is it important to understand how FBOs and their workers conceptualize social justice.

Geographers thus far have examined mainly Evangelical rescue missions in the context of the neoliberalizing American political climate. Scholarship on FBOs in the U.S. is limited, yet shows that conceptions within Evangelical denominations and their workers culminate into individualistic notions (individuals are free to achieve as much as they choose to in life) of poverty as a result of individual and spiritual failure. Not all FBO’s are Evangelical or denominational and some have explicit focus on social issues (Beaumont 2008). I have chosen to provide a case study of the Mission Year program and its current (2011-2012) and past participants. Specifically, my research examines the shift in conceptualizations of social justice in Mission Year participants as a result of participation in the program.

Mission Year is affiliated with Christian Community Development (CCD), a movement associated with the three R philosophy/strategy developed by John Perkins, that applies what they call, 'creative solutions' to the deterioration and poverty of American inner cities. Community in CCD is multileveled. There is the church community – Christians supporting one another and sharing their spirituality with their neighborhood. The Christian community then participates in building a wider community. This means, on one level, building relationships/friendships with neighbors – reconciling racial differences and building trust. On another level, CCD community building means bolstering the economic opportunities and necessary services for people there by, for example, opening businesses (creating jobs and revenue) or health centers so residents may work and be well. CCD responds to three needs (which are termed 'felt needs') that are universal and essential for persons to develop, grow, and secure a sense of

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1 Because the word evangelical has dual meanings, for the purposes of this thesis it is necessary that I distinguish meaning by capitalizing Evangelical when referring to the conservative/fundamentalist as opposed to liberal types of church affiliations, and lower case evangelical when referring simply to the gospel of Christ and his teachings.
dignity. These felt needs are (1) the need to belong, (2) the need to be significant and important, and (3) the need for a reasonable amount of security. Perkins (1995:21) writes that CCD begins with people transformed by the love of God, who then respond to God’s call to share the gospel with others through evangelism, social action, economic development, and justice. These groups of Christians start both churches and community development corporations, evangelism outreaches and tutoring programs, discipleship groups and housing programs, prayer groups and businesses.

This work is carried out by Christians through acting on the three R's – Relocation (living among the poor), Reconciliation (forming intimate relationships with the poor to break down every racial, ethnic, and economic barrier), and Redistribution (participation in relocation and reconciliation causes investment of resources in poor neighborhoods that naturally create redistribution) (Perkins 1995). Those who participate in this action are termed 'intentional neighbors' or 'strategic neighbors' (Lupton 1997; Hankins and Martin, forthcoming). Mission Year team members relocate for a year to live with other participants in a house in a high-poverty urban neighborhood. They become intentional neighbors, deliberately forming relationships with local residents and working at service sites serving the needy in their neighborhood. This research analyzes how participating in the three R strategy on which the Mission Year program is built upon impacts the participants' conceptions of social justice.

Chapter two discusses current discourses in the social sciences surrounding faith-based organizations. This chapter will also examine justice theory. Since the neoliberal system extends from liberalism, a political philosophy which states that “human well-being is maximized when individuals are free to pursue their own interests provided that doing so causes no harm to others” (Gregory et al. 2009: 417), I first discuss what I have termed liberal-based justice. Next I explore equity-based justice theories that name justice as redistribution (to address an unjust distribution of wealth and resource between the rich and the poor), recognition of group difference (to address the injustice of unequal participation in social life between advantaged and disadvantaged groups of people), and equal

---

2 The term liberal-justice here is not all encompassing for all elements of liberal theory.
participation (to address unequal participation in democratic processes). Chapter three explains the methodology for this research, describing the qualitative approaches I used to analyze texts and interviews with participants. Chapter four explores Mission Year participants’ new perceptions of American cultural values, the American church, and the American economic system that inspire a shift toward conceptualizing social justice as offering dignity to marginalized persons through forming personal relationships. In this chapter, I therefore make the argument that by gaining a new understanding of poverty and injustice through the realization of their facilitation by the American culture, church, and economic system, justice for the participants, is knowing. Chapter six demonstrates that justice is more than knowing, it requires acting on what is known and thus I argue that, according to participants, justice is also doing. Doing justice means relocating, building relationships and community, serving the community by submitting resources to it, sacrificing by living a simplistic life-style, and spending time in solitude and prayer. The CCD model of doing justice, precipitating the shift in participants, I argue in this chapter, is a strategy that addresses both misrecognition and maldistribution. Chapter 6 offers a summary of the previous discussions.
2 LITERATURE REVIEW

An agglomeration of influences have created declining conditions in poor urban neighborhoods. Racism, disinvestment, depopulation, and technological advances in transportation and communication in concert have had devastating effects on cities (Jackson 1985). Such processes have been promoted by government policy (Walker and Lewis 2001). Facilitating policies have included public expenditures on roads and utilities to the suburbs, blocks on rail as an alternative mode of transportation through taxes, tax codes that allowed industry to abandon perfectly sound building structures in the city to relocate to the periphery, and the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) insuring home loans that enabled, in the 1940’s and 50’s, large numbers of white people to buy homes outside the city (Jackson 1985, Sugrue 1996). These realities precipitated widespread urban poverty as cities experienced a massive exodus of citizens and huge losses of capital investment and tax revenues (Jackson 1985, Sugrue 1996).

As noted earlier, this thesis adopts social justice as defined by Susan Fainstein’s idea of the ‘just city,’ where public investment and regulation will produce equitable outcomes rather than support those who are already well-off. This idea of justice is grounded in the concept of justice as ‘fairness’ as established by John Rawls in 1971 and widely accepted as a starting point for many contemporary theories of justice (Hartman 1984, Soja 2010).

By this criteria, neoliberal policies, rooted in liberalism, are unjust. Liberalism is the foundation for our liberal democratic society (politically, economically, and socially) that operated, from inception until New Deal interventionist policies, under the classical liberal economic system which holds as its three major tenets: (1) the individual pursuit of pleasure, (2) the unfettered market, and (3) a non-interventionist state (Hackworth 2007). The interventionist policies of the Keynesian welfare state (operating from the 1930’s until the deregulation of the 1980’s), meant to alleviate poverty through federal dollars allocated to cities based on social need and stabilization, caused a backlash in the 1940’s by lib-
eral economists who created the new ideology of neoliberalism – increasingly implemented in the 
1980's by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher (Peck and Tickell 2002, Harvey 2005). In its nascent 
stages the neoliberal agenda focused on the devolution of the state through privatization of services 
that government provided under the Keynesian system.

However, in direct contrast to liberalism's promotion of a non-interventionist state, what has ac-
tually evolved is a relationship between private business and the state (as previously noted) where gov-
ernment has taken on the role of ensuring new markets for private business using public tax dollars 
(Peck and Tickell 2002). Cutting government spending on social services and transferring the use of these monies toward market creation means that all of the risks are placed on the public while all of the benefits go to private business (Harvey 1989, Peck and Tickell 2002). This is accomplished by diminishing public voices in decision making processes. Political processes were once decided between local elected urban government officials and their constituencies, yet in the neoliberal system, according to Harvey (1989), it is now 'urban governance' that dictates the organization of space.

Urban governance is comprised of coalitions of often times nonlocal or what Peck and Tickell 
(2002) term 'extralocal' business regimes, city government, and real estate/property developers (Harvey 
1989). Harvey (1989) asserts that this competitive environment is the result of government replacing 
the managerial approaches of the Keynesian era with entrepreneurial actions (efficiency and profes-
sionalization), meaning government now runs like a business with the goal of economic growth. In the 
neoliberal system, federal dollars are no longer distributed to cities based on social need. Funding is 
now competed for by cities and awarded to states that have promise of turning it into economic growth 
(Purcell 2008). Since its implementation, neoliberalism has been creating a larger gap between the rich 
and the poor – from 1979 to 1997 alone the bottom fifth of wage earners fell $100 a year (in inflation 
adjusted dollars) while the highest one percent experienced increases on 414,000 dollars a year (Defil-
lipis 2004). Given that neoliberal policies support the already well-off, this section provides a discussion
of liberal-based justice and, because it does not provide equitable outcomes, a further discussion of equity-based justice theories which include conceptions of justice as redistribution, recognition of group difference, and equal participation. As this research intends to add knowledge to discourses surrounding the relationship between faith-based actors and social justice, I begin this section with look at current scholarly additions to the understanding of faith-based organizations.

2.1 Faith-based Welfare Services

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 houses a section known as “Charitable Choice,” which urges states to utilize community and faith-based organizations in distributing federally funded welfare services while protecting the religious nature of the organization and the religious freedom of its clients (Cnaan and Boddie 2002). Considering the wide variation of private actors, mission statements, and religious denominations, understanding of the conceptions of justice in faith-based organizations, including their workers, is quite limited. Geographical scholarship has, for decades, contributed greatly to the debate on social justice. Since, as previously mentioned, neoliberalism exacerbates poverty while shifting welfare services toward FBOs, attention in the social sciences is increasingly turning to faith-based organizations. Some important knowledge has been contributed in the social sciences about the effectiveness of FBOs as service providers (Ferguson et al. 2007, Reingold et al. 2007, Adkin et al. 2010, Brashler 2010), practices within FBOs (Brashler 2010), and the role of FBOs in a neoliberal system, including the political capacity of FBOs (Conradson 2006, Beaumont 2008), and the possibilities FBOs carry for progressing social justice (Beaumont and Diaz 2008, Hackworth 2010).

Ferguson et al. (2007) claim that, although faith-based programs have been evidenced to enhance beneficial client outcomes including higher levels of well-being, emotional adjustment, and academic attainment, research has been “disproportionately focused both on clients' perspectives and
short-term outcomes” (275). Related to these findings, Brashler's (2010) case study of the FBO Tree of Life, providing relief to the Sicangu Lakota of the Rosebud Sioux Reservation, revealed that in the long term there was little change in poverty and suffering. However, Ferguson et al. (2007) argues that methodological limitations at present make it difficult to evaluate outcomes in both private and public social programs. Some social scientists have made progress rather in evaluating various practices within FBOs. Brashler's (2010) study of Tree of Life displayed that the program's top-down development model operates within a pattern of historical cultural domination. Reingold et al. (2007), in comparing FBO services and secular services, discovered that after welfare reform placed a greater demand on FBOs, 27 percent of FBOs reported that they tightened the eligibility criteria for services, where only 8.3 percent of nonreligious organizations (NROs) reported taking this action.

This tightening, however, could be related to the fact that, as Adkins (2010) found, without the involvement of government in social services, FBOs lack the political, economic, and social capital to handle poverty. Similarly, Cnann and Bodie (2002) estimate that congregations do not possess the skill and capacity to handle welfare issues. As neoliberalism increases welfare needs, geographers have begun to study FBOs in relation to neoliberal ideology. From Hackworth (2010) we learn that many rescue missions for the homeless, including the staff, are both ideologically opposed to accepting government funds and convinced that poverty is caused by individual failure to succeed economically and spiritually. He concludes that gospel rescue missions perpetuate neoliberal ideology (Hackworth 2010). However, Hackworth also explains that most gospel rescue missions are fundamentalist (also known as Evangelical or conservative) in orientation (Hackworth 2010). Yet Evangelical denominations are far from the only denominations providing faith-based services. Mark Chaves (1999: 844) explains the distinction,

The 'liberal' denominations are the inheritors of a religious tradition, perhaps reaching its peak in the Social Gospel movement at the beginning of the twentieth century, that encouraged wide-ranging institutional engagement between religious organizations and the world. What are now called 'conservative' denominations are the inheritors of a
religious tradition that discouraged such institutional engagement in favor of evangelism and an emphasis on individual morality rather than social reform or social service.

Hackworth does, however, recognize this distinction. He reported that although there exists a political push toward FBO’s as an alternative to public assistance, most FBO’s do not align themselves with such neoliberal politics, see their role as an extension of state service, and call for an increase in government welfare intervention (Hackworth and Akers 2010). We can begin to gain further knowledge of how faith-based actors understand justice if we examine the wide range of religious organizations providing services. As some current scholarship has focused on Evangelical FBO’s, this research on Mission Year – an organization that claims no denomination and incorporates social justice into its goals – will provide further understanding of FBOs as they relate to justice.

Goode (2006) has discovered that since neoliberalism has created external pressures on FBOs to secure funding, an FBO “once proudly focused on collective community and empowerment for social justice,” has been forced to alter its mission and is now “reduced to being an assembly line for ‘training’ individuals as separate labor units” (203). Shifting from activism to neoliberalism, the mission became focused on individualism – blaming the problems of the poor on their behavior – and solutions culminated into individual uplift (Goode 2006). Beaumont and Diaz (2008), in one case study in The Netherlands, have also discovered neoliberal efficiency and professionalization at work within FBO programs that resulted in a decrease in specific and personalized care. However, in another case study in The Netherlands of an FBO that was people centered (emphasizing building relationships with people) rather than centered on problem solving, Beaumont and Diaz (2008) found the FBO had placed the old “guardianship” values of the welfare state over efficiency. Beaumont’s (2008) work explores FBOs as agents of social change. In the city of Rotterdam, The Netherlands, Beaumont (2008) concluded that neoliberalization has politicized faith-actors to mobilize for social justice. Beaumont’s contributions reveal that FBOs can act as either neoliberal agents or agents of social change.
Conradson’s (2007) addition to existing research on the engagement of FBOs with social justice displayed how Christchurch in New Zealand concerned its mission with socioeconomic inequality and the structures and processes that produce them rather than simply providing emergency relief. Conradson and Beaumont have contributed the knowledge that FBOs can be an active force in working toward just outcomes. However, there are clear differences between other countries and the United States (as Beaumont himself has acknowledged about the United States and Europe) in Christianity, culture and poverty that suggest that Beaumont and Conradson's work is relevant, but insufficient in understanding the role of social justice in American FBO's. Furthermore, through Goode's (2006) work we have seen how neoliberal pressures can create a shift in an FBO program. It has yet to be understood how FBO service programs may create shifts in their volunteers, particularly concerning their conceptions of justice. This research intends to contribute to such an understanding.

2.2 Contemporary Theories of Justice

Conceptions of justice are highly subjective and contingent upon the values that have developed historically in any community (Fainstein 2010). In this subsection I will discuss two categories of justice theory, liberal-based and equity-based justice. The former places ultimate value on freedom and equality in the context of liberalism, while the latter most values providing equity and fairness to the least advantaged. As previously discussed, liberalism assumes that human well-being will be maximized when individuals, who share equality, pursue their own interests while causing no harm to others. The main focus between liberal-based justice and equity-based justice is in the contrast between equality and equity. Equity emphasizes that 'appropriateness' holds more value than 'sameness' in the treatment of persons (Fainstein 2010). This means that appropriate actions are taken to favor the least advantaged, illuminating fairness rather than simply the same, or equal treatment of persons (Fainstein
Equity is concerned with people's “actual lives,” in other words, with “the way people's lives go” (Sen 2009).

### 2.2.1 Liberal-based Justice

#### 2.2.1.1 Liberal Justice

Widespread and deeply rooted in the fabric of our society is liberalism (Purcell 2008, Young 1990). For over two hundred years enlightenment ideals of freedom and equality – precipitated by the oppression of citizens living under the rule of kings and queens within the political system of Absolute Monarchy – have shaped notions of justice as freedom or liberation (Young 1990). I term this perception of justice as *liberal justice* because of its origination in this liberal political philosophy. The emphasis is on individualism – the primacy of the individual as the basic political unit (Purcell 2008). The American Revolution brought in a “revolutionary conception of humanity and society. All people are equal...inasmuch as all have a capacity for reason and moral sense” (Young 1990: 156). Liberal justice focuses on furnishing individuals with personal rights such as securing freedom from tyranny, freedom of speech and conscience, equal treatment before the law, a fair trial, property rights, and protection from unreasonable searches and seizures (Purcell 2008, Soja 2010). Provision of these liberal rights is facilitated by a distinctive division between the public and the private spheres where the private sphere is the personal space of home and family solely under the individuals' own control and the public sphere is where an individual is seen, heard, and able to influence the state and society (Mitchell 2003, Purcell 2008, Young 1990).

An important aspect of liberal justice is democracy. Individual preferences can be expressed through voting (Gregory et al. 2009). Each individual is afforded the right to voluntarily enter the public sphere to democratically give voice regarding political, economic, and social decisions and retreat back to the private sphere (Mitchell 2003). Originally the rights of liberal justice were only given to property-
owning white males, yet, those rights have been extended to persons of color, persons with no property, and women (Mitchell 2003). Adherents of liberal justice place the economy in the private sphere where it is not subject to democratic control, limiting the government’s ability to control capitalism (Purcell 2008). Liberal justice is theorized to produce just economic outcomes as envisioned by Adam Smith in the late 18th century. Economic justice, for Smith, will naturally occur if two conditions are met. First, supply and demand must be allowed the freedom to achieve their natural equilibrium on the open market. Second, each individual must be a rational actor in their own self-interest (Hartman 1984). From these ideas extend the widely believed liberal principle that poverty and uneven distributions of wealth are justified by individual merit, meaning, the outcomes are just because each individual has the opportunity to make rational choices concerning his or her own achievements in life (Young 1990). Accordingly, an individual will be either wealthy or poor as a result of the choices they make. This implies that individuals deserve to be either rich or poor because no other person or thing, including government or business, can be responsible for the outcome but one’s own personal choices. Just outcomes, in liberal justice, rather hinge on the belief that all citizens are equal by law and as such, the law will protect their rights. Liberal justice is a universalized (for everyone) justice dispensing natural rights (human rights of equality and freedom afforded from birth) upheld by a 'blind' (unbiased) legal system (Soja 2010).

Liberal justice, in summary, stems from natural rights of individuals to freely – uninhibited by any government intervention – and rationally pursue their own self interest. These rights cannot be taken away, as they are afforded by birth, and are universal to all humans. Justice is achieved through the legal system upholding these universal rights for all of its citizens and ensuring a free and open market for citizens to pursue wealth. However, liberal justice has received much criticism from social scientists. Neoliberalism operates under the assumption of liberal justice (Peck and Tickell 2002). The displacement of poor urban residents (Davis 1990), sinking wages (Purcell 2008) leading to increased
homelessness (Mitchell 2003), policies favoring development of some geographical territories over other areas left to suffer under disinvestment (Harvey 1973, Soja 2010), and persons of certain racial, ethnic or gender groups excluded from economic opportunities or political participation (Young 1990, Sen 2009) have all been named as injustices unaddressable by liberal approaches. The individualism uncovered in faith-based organizations by the research of both Hackworth and Beaumont is related to liberal justice. As liberal justice affords neoliberalism the right to create poverty by, for example, favoring certain territories and groups, it is important to gain knowledge about the conceptions of justice held by faith-based actors who provide services in disadvantaged territories for disadvantaged groups. There has been much scholarship devoted to moving toward more equity-based justice. It is important that social scientists discover the existence of faith-based actors who adhere to more equitable conceptions of justice.

2.2.2 Equity-Based Justice

2.2.2.1 Redistribution

As justice has been established as fairness, it is widely accepted that there must be a more even distribution of material goods (resources, income and wealth) and non-material goods such as jobs and social positions (Hartman 1984, Harvey 1973, Smith 1994, Soja 2010, Young 1990). The capitalist economic structure produces unjust outcomes by favoring one territory over another through distributing material and non-material goods to meet the needs of certain people in certain areas, leaving behind “localized pockets of high unfulfilled need” (Harvey 1973). Examples of such uneven geographies include high-poverty inner cities (where Mission Year operates) and Appalachia (Harvey 1973). Harvey (1973) suggests that a territorial socially just distribution can be justly arrived at if (1) distribution of income (a) meets the needs of the populations in each territory, and (b) resources are allocated to maximize interterritorial multiplier effects, and (c) territories with special physical and social
environmental difficulties receive extra resources to compensate, and (2) institutional, organizational, political and economic mechanisms are arranged to maximize the prospects of the least advantaged territories. An examination of justice conceptions in faith-based volunteers offers further understanding of how faith-based actors perceive the relationship between justice, resources and territories.

Harvey addresses both just outcomes and the structural processes that produce uneven geographies. Soja (2010) adds that unjust outcomes, which also include social inequalities, are socially produced and maintained. As such, a just distribution requires first addressing the unequal power relations that create unjust distributions (Soja 2010). Given this, Young (1990) argues that “while distributive issues are crucial to a satisfactory conception of justice, it is a mistake to reduce social justice to distribution (15).” In fact, for Young, evaluating the patterns of distribution is simply the starting point in theorizing justice. Distributive justice ignores certain non-distributive issues such as decision-making (some groups have no voice in decisions affecting their lives), divisions of labor (unequal allocation of occupations, such as “male” or “female” occupations), and culture (meanings attached to certain groups of people can affect their opportunities) (Young 1990). Since certain groups are disadvantaged in these ways that cannot be resolved by distributive patterns, theories of justice have increasingly called for recognition of group difference.

2.2.2 Recognition of Group Difference

Iris Young (1990) has shown that the “distributive paradigm” cannot address injustice caused by the oppression and domination of groups. Though few have denied this point, the solutions have still yet to be agreed upon (Harvey 1996). There has emerged, however, a relatively recent theoretical paradigm that claims justice as recognition of group difference (Fraser 1996). Young (1990) defines a social group as “a collective of persons differentiated from at least one other group by cultural forms, practices, or a way of life” (43). Oppression, as defined by new left social movements since the 1960’s,
has come to mean disadvantage and injustice suffered by some simply because of everyday practices in a well-intentioned liberal society (Young 1990). Groups flow out of social relations while capitalism negotiates and manipulates social life into a class struggle (Young 1990, Harvey 1996). In this way, groups suffer oppression both culturally and economically as a result of everyday practices in liberal society.

Young (1990) criticizes some philosophers and policymakers who have altogether denied the existence of social groups. She argues that the only way to promote full participation of oppressed groups is through recognizing particular rights for these groups. In other words, some groups need to be shown partiality— to be recognized — because within an impartial system that extends universal rights to all equally, the most well-off (the advantaged) control the opportunities and realities of the least advantaged by owning the resources to gain the political power that ensures them a stronger voice in the decision making processes that affect the lives of the disadvantaged (Young 1990). Examples of groups that may be marginalized or oppressed by everyday practices of society include women, elderly people, single mothers and their children, mentally and physically disabled people, involuntarily unemployed people, or any racially marked groups such as Black or Latino people (Young 1990). Though most concede that recognition of group difference is essential, it is to some, however, problematic because while recognition of group difference could solve cultural injustices, it can potentially cause economic injustice (uneven distributions of wealth) (Fraser 1996).

Yet Fraser denies that politics of recognition and politics of redistribution are necessarily mutually exclusive. She contends there is a hybrid form of collectivity she names “bivalent.” She explains that,

Bivalent collectivities, in sum, may suffer both socioeconomic maldistribution and cultural misrecognition in forms where neither of these injustices is an indirect effect on the other, but where both are primary and co-original. In their case, neither the politics of redistribution alone nor the politics of recognition alone will suffice. Bivalent collectivities need both. (Fraser 1996: 15).
As such, Fraser finds solutions in ceasing to view redistribution and recognition as belonging to the two separate societal domains – economic and cultural. By assigning all practices simultaneously economic and cultural, they can be seen as two perspectives of the same domain (Fraser 1996). Many theorists recognize there is also a balance to be realized within a workable justice theory that can be both impartial (universal or abstract) and partial (particular or specific) at the same time (Young 1990, Harvey 1996, Smith 2000, Lawson 2007). In essence, what is needed is a universal impartial justice that ensures rights of non-injury that is supplemented with some form of partial justice that prevents universality of indifference toward others (Smith 2000). Fraser (1996) suggests a pragmatic approach that critically evaluates and assigns differing remedies to various instances of misrecognition. She explains,

> Everything depends on precisely what currently the misrecognized people need in order to be able to participate as peers in social life. And there is no reason to assume that all of them need the same thing in every context. In some cases, they may need to be unburdened of excessive ascribed or constructed distinctiveness. In other cases, they may need to have hitherto underacknowledged distinctiveness taken into account. In still other cases, they may need to shift the focus onto dominant or advantaged groups, outing the latters' distinctiveness, which has been falsely parading as universality. Alternatively, they may need to deconstruct the very terms in which attributed differences are currently elaborated. Finally, they may need all of the above or several of the above, in combination with one another and in combination with redistribution (35).

Fraser (1996: 3) makes a simple call for a “difference friendly world, where assimilation to majority or dominant cultural norms is no longer the price of equal respect.” Groups are oppressed by dominant notions of universality; in fact, Young (1990) stresses that since the dominant groups' culture and identity is taken as normality, it is the dominant group that constructs the difference that constitutes another group as lacking. In other words, non-dominant groups are defined from the outside. As such, it is crucial to study the conceptions of justice in faith-based actors, particularly considering they are in daily contact with marginalized groups who likely suffer misrecognition. How are poor urban residents identified and recognized by faith workers? Group recognition is named as justice so that groups may gain equal respect in social life. Young (1990) asserts that group domination as it stands can only be
avoided if “oppressed groups are able to express their interests and experience in public on an equal basis with other groups” (95). In light of this, many theorists have turned justice theories toward questions of equal participation in society.

### 2.2.2.3 Equal Participation

Equal participation in the decisions that affect people’s daily lives has been a component named in several justice theories (Young 1990, Fraser 1996, Fainstein 2010). Many instances of injustice stemming from unequal participation begin with contests over the arrangement of space (Harvey 1973, Soja 2010). Capital investment must produce spaces that realize its own present needs, not people’s needs; therefore, Lefebvre argues that capitalism is in direct struggle with the disadvantaged who are “fighting to take greater control over how space is socially produced in order to make major transformations to better meet their needs” (Soja 2010: 98). Harvey agrees that social justice is “contingent upon the social processes operating in society as a whole” and that “social processes are spatial” (Harvey 1973). In seeking to equally involve the disadvantaged in such social processes, many theorists have turned attention to democracy. Democracy is particularly crucial to social justice because neoliberal policies are increasingly squashing public voices concerning the organization of space (Harvey 1989, Peck and Tickell 2002). Young (1990) contends that institutional arrangements (including decision making structures) and class relations permitted in liberal systems create economic domination. She explains,

> Economic domination in our society occurs not simply or primarily because some persons have more wealth and income than others, as important as this is. Economic domination derives at least as much from the corporate and legal structures and procedures that give some persons the power to make decisions about investment, production, marketing, employment, interest rates, and wages that affect millions of other people (23).

Urban governance and economic domination have instigated a call among theorists for democracy as justice.
Fainstein and Purcell acknowledge, however, that democracy does not guarantee just outcomes (Purcell 2008, Fainstein 2010). Fainstein questions whether we should put any faith at all in the efficacy of open communication. She asserts that “after deliberation has run its course, people may still make choices that are harmful to themselves or to minorities” (Fainstein 2010). She suggests that groups be consulted and then represented by advocates. In the case of development, Fainstein argues that planners and policy analysts are the “experts” out in the field collecting and aggregating data. Her argument follows that if experts were justice minded, they could present the data in ways that promote just outcomes. She writes,

To the extent that experts present analyses not just of benefit/cost ratios but of who gets the benefits and who bears the costs, they can shift the debate toward a concern with equity. (Fainstein 2010: 181)

Fainstein’s suggestions are unique in that they can be utilized at any moment by justice minded experts, even within the current neoliberal capitalist system. Fainstein argues that capitalism can be incrementally moved closer to more just outcomes. She discusses that, “There are many possible capitalisms with many different ways of interjecting non-capitalist principles within social and economic institutions (Fainstein 2010: 19).” In contrast, Purcell (2008) calls for an extension of democracy into new spheres, such as economy and home. As stated previously, the liberal democratic system has traditionally placed economy in the private sphere, free from government intervention, and more importantly for Purcell, free from public democratic deliberation. Purcell (2008: 83) writes, “The liberal democratic model limits democracy to a narrowly defined public sphere, a sphere more or less coterminous with the state. It therefore leaves whole swaths of society unaffected by democracy's logic and values.”

Purcell (2008) finds solutions in what should be a malleable “radical democratization” where a sense of public collective could instigate a democratic approach to social relations within new spheres in different ways in different places at different times. However, he explains that a “necessary corollary”
to such radical democratization is the presence of radical equalization, defined as “a substantial equality whereby all people are materially, politically and culturally equivalent in a way that makes political equality truly possible” (Purcell 2008: 85). Fraser (1996:30), too, holds that “justice requires social arrangements that permit all (adult) members of society to interact with one another as peers.”

It is not by accident that justice as redistribution, justice as recognition of group difference and justice as equal participation are widely discussed in contemporary justice theories. They are related and dependent upon one another for their realization. For example, as previously noted by Young (1990), oppression will only be avoided if groups are recognized by democratically expressing their interests on an equal basis with other groups. What they also have in common is that they illuminate needs that liberal justice exercised in our liberal democratic society fail to meet (Harvey 1973, Young 1990, Peck and Tickell 2002, Mitchell 2003, Purcell 2008, Soja 2010). In light that the injustices equity-based theories intend to alleviate – group exclusion of political, social, and economic decisions that affect their lives – are suffered by many who seek assistance from FBOs, it is absolutely imperative that we gain more knowledge about how faith-based actors conceptualize justice. If faith-based volunteers are justice minded, their advocacy and approaches toward poverty might look very different than what Hackworth has discovered in Evangelical missions: that poverty is simply a result of individual and spiritual failure. In the next chapter I underline the methodological framework used to discover the shift in conceptions of justice in Mission Year participants.
3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Question

This research is designed to answer the question: How does participation in the Mission Year program shift participants’ concept of social justice? Key to answering this question is understanding how the Mission Year program promotes social justice. This thesis will seek to discover, through an examination of Mission Year academic materials and through interviews with Mission Year participants, how participants are informed and influenced about social justice by their engagement in the program itself.

3.2 Case Study: Mission Year Atlanta

There are several fundamental advantages to case studies, (1) they provide a foundation for observations and concepts about social action and social structures viewed at close range in a natural setting, (2) they permit a more holistic study of complex social networks and of complexes of social action and social meanings, (3) they, through dimensions of time and history, enable the investigator to examine continuity and change in lifeworld patterns, and (4) they encourage and facilitate theoretical innovation and generalization (Feagin et al. 1991). My case study increases knowledge about social action and change in lifeworld patterns. Although this thesis will examine one single case, it maintains relevance because, as Feagin et al. (1991) argue, single case studies and several case studies alike remain indispensable to the progress of the social sciences. In my research, the case study method is appropriate because of the uniqueness yet importance of Mission Year as representative of broader Christian community development efforts.

Mission Year is an FBO that has run its urban ministry program in various cities including Atlanta, Philadelphia, Houston, Oakland, and Chicago. The program places teams of six to seven Christians between the ages of 18 and 30 in a house to live for one year together within a high-poverty inner city
neighborhood of need. Some houses are filled with married couples and some full of single people.

Mission Year recruiters travel the United States speaking or setting up tables at churches, colleges, and various events to inform people about the program. It is expected that each new recruit will raise $12,000 to participate for the year, but it is not required. Approximately 100 people per year participate in the program. I asked a staff member if many people drop out midyear and was told that in the last few years only 2 to 3 have done so. My data was collected during the 2011-2012 Mission Year when the program had three houses operating in different Atlanta neighborhoods. The participants in one of the houses, the married couples, were not included in the study; therefore, I conducted research on the single adult participants from the houses in the English Avenue and Polar Rock neighborhoods. This was not by design, it was simply a result of availability of contact information.

The foundation of the program is based on the “three R” philosophy of Christian community development writer and practitioner John Perkins, who was a veteran of the civil rights movement. Since the poverty of inner cities is a function of isolation from the flow of resources, his three R strategy proposes, as previously discussed, that (1) people with resources must relocate to live among the poor, (2) that those who relocate work to build community through relationships with the marginalized in order to instigate a racial (or possibly also a class) reconciliation, and (3) that consequently relocation and reconciliation will precipitate a natural redistribution of resources. Anyone can choose to adopt this strategy, yet, Perkins argues the case that Christians should carry out this work because the bible mandates Christians to take care of the poor and not to oppress others (Perkins 2005). The Mission Year organization offers no official definition of social justice, its motto is simply to “love God and love people.” Within this framework, the program relocates people of privilege into communities of need and then requires them to build community through relationships in their new neighborhoods, to spend time drawing closer to God each morning through bible reading and prayer, and to serve the poor.
Interviews with Mission Year staff members revealed the rules of the program (refer to methods and data in section 3.3). The rules are designed to replicate the three R philosophy. For one year, Mission Year team members must (1) relocate, (2) have community dinners every Saturday night—inviting neighbors over to eat, (3) volunteer 25-30 hours between Monday and Thursday at a neighborhood service site (4) have “family” nights building Christian community with other Mission Year team mates, (5) complete a curriculum including various academic materials such as reading books, watching documentaries, and listening to guest speakers, (6) refrain from watching any television at all, (7) have limited access to various other electronic media, cell phones and their home social network, (8) use public transportation (they can have a bike, but no car), (9) spend time each morning in solitude and prayer, and (6) live minimally or as it is often termed “living in simplicity” or “living simply.” Minimalistic living includes an allotment of $70 a month for women and $60 for men. This money can go for any expenses such as laundry, feminine products, shampoo, or taking a neighborhood kid to the movies. Beyond this money, each receives $17 a week for food.

To build community Mission Year situates participants to live, work, go to church, and play in the neighborhood so they can get to know the residents in the neighborhood. Therefore, Mission Year partners with organizations that are already working in the neighborhoods, such as New Horizon Senior Center. Mission Year provides these organizations with free labor for a year and in return Mission Year receives some donation money. This is essential to how they choose the neighborhoods in which to operate. Mission year looks for a community of need, where organizations are already functioning to alleviate the particular problems in that community. Equally important is the existence of a neighborhood church that is willing to partner with Mission Year. The team members become a part of that church community and take on responsibilities within the church. Besides donations from partner organizations, Mission Year also holds fundraisers for money. They try to secure funding for participants who cannot raise the money to join the program. A staff member told me that they do not want money
to hinder people from participating because they do not want to have “a club for privileged kids who can afford to do it” and because “everyone needs to learn these principles, we want to make it open for people to learn them” (initial interview, 2012).

Thus, the goal of the program is twofold. The leaders of Mission Year want to provide full time volunteers to help the poor in what they term, “under-resourced” communities while, also, they teach participants the three R philosophy or “principles” via their curriculum. The curriculum is designed to convey this specific message and to do so through diverse authors. They include a wide range of perspectives, including Black authors, women authors, and non-Christian authors. Participants learn about numerous issues surrounding intentional neighboring while simultaneously experiencing them in the English Avenue and Polar Rock neighborhoods. What is evident about both English Avenue and Polar Rock is that they suffer immensely from lack of investment. Figure 1 depicts both neighborhoods, which are located in the central part of city of Atlanta. Figures 2 and 3 reveal the breadth of vacant properties in both neighborhoods. For these figures, I created a ratio for each using ArcGIS by dividing the number of vacant houses, according to the 2010 Census, by the number of total houses in the neighborhood, also provided by the 2010 Census. The English Avenue house sits on a city block that is 73-100% vacant. The Polar rock neighborhood is completely surrounded on the east, west, and south by streets where 34-60% of the homes are unoccupied, while the north streets are 48-60% vacant. Figure 4 displays the house at English Avenue. Figures 5, 6, and 7 represent the houses nearby the English Avenue house on the same street. Figure 8 displays the Polar Rock house. Figures 9, 10, and 11 show the houses surrounding the Polar Rock house of various sides.
Figure 1 English Avenue and Polar Rock neighborhoods in Atlanta
Figure 2 Percentage Vacant Houses in English Avenue
Figure 3 Percentage Vacant Houses in Polar Rock
Figure 4 English Avenue House
Figure 5 Vacant Apartment Building in English Ave (on same street as Mission Year house)

Figure 6 Across and down the block from English Avenue house
Figure 7 Directly across the street from English Avenue house

Figure 8 Polar Rock House
Figure 9 Just north of Polar Rock house

Figure 10 Street behind Polar Rock house to the east
3.3 Methods and data

It is my intent that this research will further knowledge of how justice is actually perceived in actual people. In order to sufficiently examine shifting conceptions of justice as a result of a personal experience in the Mission Year program, a qualitative approach is most appropriate. My data consists of semi-structured interviews, and the textual data and documentary films included in the Mission Year curriculum.

Figure 11 Just north of Polar Rock house
3.3.1 Interviews

Interviews allow researchers to find the information that is most relevant to the informant (Dunn 2010). I employ the open ended approach to interviewing because it offers not only a two-way interaction between interviewer and interviewee, but the freedom to reformulate questions to guide informants to a clearer understanding of interview questions and allow researchers to discover intended meaning in informant responses (Herod, 1993). In order to get an in-depth picture of the Mission Year program, I conducted a total of 18 semi-structured interviews with active participants and past participants (during the 2011-2012 year). I interviewed 10 new Mission Year team members during the fifth month of their Mission Year experience and 6 past team members, one of whom is a current Mission Year employee. This one employee, I will name Shelley, spoke to me as a staff member, informing about the organization and its goals, yet offered to extend the interview and also spoke to me of her former experience as a Mission Year team member. Therefore, I included her voice also as one of the past members.

The remaining two interviews I conducted with other staff members who were also past members, whom I have given the pseudonyms Sue and Bart, were mainly focused on discussion of the organization. As the interviews with Sue and Bart were not designed to discover a shift in their conception of justice, I asked them no questions about their background. By observation, it is clear that both are white and educated. Thus, the following breakdown of interviewees does not include these two staff members who were not interviewed as either a new or a past member. Table 1 below exhibits the background of the other 16 interviewees and the pseudonyms I have chosen to assign them for the purposes of this thesis.
Table 1: Background of Mission Year Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Description of Home Neighborhood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Past Members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White middle-class suburb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debbie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White middle-class small town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharon</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White middle-class suburb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lori</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White middle-class farming town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelley (s)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White lower income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Members 2011</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Diverse suburb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White middle-class inner suburb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lillian</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White small town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>Middle-class outer suburb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White rural town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jen</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White suburb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White low to middle-class inner suburb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheryl</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Low to middle-class city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heather</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: (s) – indicates Mission Year staff member
N/A – interview did not reveal that information

A limitation of this study is that all of the past team members and staff I interviewed are all intentionally neighboring. They know each other and are in community with one another. I received all of my contacts from intentional neighbors, who put me in contact with other intentional neighbors. I had no access to any Mission Year members who did not continue intentional neighboring. This means that everyone I interviewed experienced a similar shift in perception because of Mission Year that influenced them to take the same course of action. The voices of past Mission Year members that may have experienced no shift in perception are not represented in this study. Yet, this research still remains relevant given the large numbers of people that, in fact, do continue to intentionally neighbor.³

³ I had received contact information for at least 5 more people who are past Mission Year members intentionally neighboring in Atlanta who did not respond to my email request for an interview.
3.3.2 Textual and documentary data

The bulk of the Mission Year Curriculum consists of books. My textual data consisted of 13 books and the documentary data were two films. The following is a list of the curriculum data included in the research:

Restoring At-Risk Communities, edited John Perkins
The Way of the Heart, Henri Nouwen
Why are all the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria,? Beverly Daniel Tatum
Community and Growth (chapter one), Jean Vanier
The Next Evangelicalism, Soong-Chan Rah
What Would Jesus Buy (film documentary)
The Power of Race (PBS documentary)
The Ragamuffin Gospel, Brennan Manning
Jesus and the Disinherited, Howard Thurman
The Secret of the Christian Life (article), John Alexander
A Different Drum (chapter two), M. Scott Peck
Flat Broke: Women in the Age of Welfare Reform, Sharon Hays
Simple Spirituality, Chris Heuertz
Living in Color, Randy Woodley
Sidewalks in the Kingdom, Eric Jacobsen

There were four other books in the curriculum I did not include in my study. Two are fictional novels, one is another spiritual book called Practicing our Faith, and the last is the Gospel of John from the bible.

The last seven titles in the list above were not yet read by the new team members at the time of our interview. However, it must be noted that all of the “principles” that Shelley hopes the program will teach participants, which I will be discussing as “themes,” had, prior to my interviews, already been presented to new members within the first 6 books and the two documentaries. The remaining books simply provided different perspectives and evidence supporting the same themes. Given this reality, I included all 13 of the books in my analysis to gain the most complete understanding of the Mission Year curriculum.
3.3.3 Analysis and coding

The analytical framework for this research draws from a mixture of content analysis and discourse analysis. I used content analysis to reveal a pattern of information and discourse analysis to analyze meanings. Traditionally, qualitative content analysis involves the counting of words to classify a number of categories that have a similar meaning within any given text (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). My approach, however, has been to count, not words, but meanings, or themes, not within the same text but among all of the texts. For example, one theme I have discovered is individualism. I have counted, not how many times one interviewee or one curriculum book itself discusses individualism, but rather how many out of all of the interviewees and books have discussed it. I have also counted how many times I received the similar answers to the following questions:

How did you define social justice prior to joining the Mission Year program?
How has Mission Year changed your understanding of social justice?
What did you believe were the causes of poverty before you joined Mission Year?
What do you understand the causes to be since relocating with Mission Year?
What injustices have you witnessed in your new neighborhood?

For discourse analysis I have turned to some strategies outlined by Dixon (2010) who suggests words, images, and practices are capable of being 'signifiers' which communicate information and meaning. I was able to detect several themes repeatedly discussed both within the curriculum and by the interviewees. I then designated a different color for each theme and color coded all of the data. Dixon argues that finding meaning entails seeing how signifiers are combined. Furthermore, in analyzing meaning, “a temporal pattern can be discerned from the analysis of a series of objects” (Dixon 2010). The pattern I discovered was that all of the themes were interconnected and belonged to a larger story about the relationship between American culture, American urban poverty, Christianity, and social justice. After reviewing all the textual data, the themes I coded were Individualism, Isolationism, Consumerism, Racism, Church Failure, Systemic Failure, Relationships, Relocation, Service, Simplicity,
and Spirituality. However, beyond identifying these themes, I utilized discourse analysis to understand more complex, underlying shifts in the way the Mission Year program and participants view the causes and consequences of urban poverty.

Discourse, Dixon (2010) argues, is embedded in the broader social realm and bound up with all kinds of power relations. Thus, researchers must also consider questions surrounding the production of an object (who is responsible for bringing it into existence?), the character of that object (how does it compare with other examples of its genre?), and consumption of that object (what sort of influence does it have on those who engage with it?). In analyzing the shift in justice conceptions in Mission Year team members, it was important to understand the concepts of justice that Mission Year was producing to influence their participants and the character of the participants themselves. As such, the positionality of the participants is relevant to their shifts in perception. Based on interviews, nearly all of the new and past team members claimed to be service minded before joining Mission Year. Only two of the 16 had neither been on a Missions trip nor been active in volunteering service. Thus, 14 of sixteen people were already active volunteers. Six engaged in either one or the other, and the remaining eight had been active in both volunteering and taking mission trips. Also relevant is the reality that most were white and while four were women of color, all were privileged enough to have the ability to take an entire year to participate in Mission Year. All were educated, and those directly out of high school, doing Mission Year in between high school and college, intended to obtain a higher education degree after they complete the program. The data in Figure 12 below reveals the college majors chosen by participants.
Figure 12 Number of Participants and Degree Program Entered
4 JUSTICE IS KNOWING

In reading through the books in the Mission Year curriculum, several themes are continually repeated. What is striking about the program is that, rather than to indoctrinate participants, it is designed for them to discover phenomena on their own through personal experience – witnessing first-hand in their new neighborhoods what the authors have written about. According to Shelly, 80 percent of what they learn is taught to them by the city, including their neighbors. Participants read hard realities about American culture, including, for example, racism or suburbanization, their embeddedness in the American Christian church, and how this has contributed to oppression, such as isolation from economic opportunities. This participant learning takes place, of course, while exchanging the comfort of their own cultural experience for the experiences of inner city poor residents who, in the case of Atlanta, are African American. Shelly calls it “deconstructing their ideas about things,” since many of us “live in obscurity because we do not want to see.” This is a central tenet of the program because, although participants are service oriented people who genuinely want to help others, unless certain cultural barriers are first torn down in their own decision making, their help will only reinforce the underlying factors that have originally placed inner city residents in need. Shelly explains that

Probably the majority of people still come to mission year because they want to do good things or they want to be a good person and share Jesus' love. But the reality of most of the motivation of that, when you read through peoples' application forms, is this privilege that they, most of the team members, live in before they get here (initial interview 2012).

The program aims to break down the power relation between giver and receiver. Shelly said many come to Mission Year with a “savior mentality” and the idea that “I have it together and I can help you get it together if you conform to the way that I think you should.”

Given this reality, one function of the curriculum is designed to create in participants a more complex understanding of American culture and how it may have influenced the way participants, not only perceive society, church, the economy, politics, and themselves, but also how these perceptions
have contributed toward the oppression of others. The themes identified from the texts include individualism, isolationism, consumerism, racism, the church, relationship with the “other,” and failure of the political and economic system to ensure the equal services to all communities. Although I will break this chapter into seven sections individually discussing each of these themes, these themes are in many cases not mutually exclusive and have strong overlap with one another. Furthermore, it must be understood that, for everyone involved in Mission Year, the bible is the epistemological authority. Biblical scripture is the underlying text through which the Mission Year materials and practices are understood. This is true regardless of the wide range of denominations, both conservative and liberal, of the various participants.

Running through the entire curriculum and staff interviews is the call for Christians to live the way Jesus did, according to his example and his teachings. As well, the injustices caused by individualism, consumerism, isolation, and racism have been practiced by Christians, and by extension the American Christian churches, following cultural teachings rather than the teaching of Jesus. Therefore, if Christians actually care for the poor and love their neighbor as Jesus proposes, then justice for the poor and oppressed will be a natural consequence flowing from this shift in living. In one of the curriculum’s books, Living in Color: Embracing God’s Passion for Ethnic Diversity by Randy Woodley (2001), participants read that “It matters not if our culture is Euro-American, Native American, African American, Asian-American, Latino or something else. When we become Christ followers, all cultures are suspect, especially our own, and we must reexamine them in the light of God’s word...” (53). He asserts that it is imperative to discover the lies on which our culture has been based because “our cultures...are part of our identities...” (136). Through college classes or personal life experiences, many of the participants had an existing understanding of the some curriculum’s concepts before entering Mission Year, however, four people directly verbalized that for any school learning, one can never really understand about concepts such as racism until they have geographically relocated themselves in a
space that is negatively affected by it. It is no coincidence that the themes being presented to the participants in the curriculum were the very themes found throughout their conversations with me about social justice. They read, they experienced, and essentially, they understood. Therefore, I am compelled to conclude that for the Mission Year program and the participants alike, a clear understanding of the contours of injustice is the beginning of justice. Justice is knowing.

4.1 Individualism

4.1.1 Individualism as a Concept in the Mission Year Curriculum

With genuine confidence, Shelly expressed that, “we have this idea that all of our living is touching everything and everybody around us, like, shared resources, shared burdens, shared work, those sorts of things...I think the opposite of that is just creating this empire for ourselves...my house, my car, my block of land...” (initial interview 2012). Like Shelly's comment, the curriculum books were also not silent on the issue of individualism. There are several different angles of the issue explored by different authors. In chapter one of *Community and Growth* by Jean Vanier, Mission Year team members read,

> Our Western civilization is competitive. From the time they start school, children learn to ‘win’...This is how individualistic material progress and the desire to gain prestige by coming out on top have taken over from the sense of fellowship, compassion, and community. Now people live more or less on their own in a small house, jealously guarding their goods and planning to acquire more, with a notice on the gate that says ‘Beware of the Dog’ (1989: 16).

A central message about individualism throughout the readings is that it is anathema to community.

Yet, notice how Vanier’s dialog on community also mentions compassion, something that Brennan Manning (1990:19) also touches on in *The Ragamuffin Gospel* when he claims that “personal responsibility has replaced personal response.” Manning’s critique charges that,

> Our Culture has made the word grace impossible to understand. We resonate to slogans such as:
'There's no free lunch;'

'You get what you deserve;'

'You want money? Work for it,'

'You want love? Earn it,'

'You want mercy? Show you deserve it...' (18).

The literature is affirming that when we are not in community with others, we are less compassionate to others who are not 'making it on their own' or 'pulling themselves up by the bootstraps.' Rejection of the ideology of individualism is found throughout the curriculum. Beverly Tatum (1977: 102) in Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? argues that the ability to even view oneself as an individual is a “legacy of White privilege,” as people of color have long been viewed as members of a group. She names rugged individualism and meritocracy as myths that “threaten not only beliefs about society but also beliefs about one's own accomplishments” (103). According to Peck (1987), no one really makes it through life without the help of others. By choosing chapter two of A Different Drum, by M. Scott Peck, Mission Year informs participants that,

...there is a point beyond which our sense of self-determination not only becomes inaccurate and prideful but increasingly self-defeating. It is true we are created to be individually unique. Yet the reality is that we are inevitably social creatures who desperately need each other not merely for sustenance, not merely for company, but for any meaning to our lives whatsoever (1987: 54).

Participants read an article by John Alexander (2011) entitled Individualism and the Body of Christ that suggests there must be a balance achieved between community and self determination. He writes,

We must all decide for ourselves. That's one of the things most likely to be agreed on today in a society crammed with cultural diversity. Each individual must make her own decisions; each person is responsible for himself and himself alone...Clearly this has a lot to be said for it...freedom of movement and freedom of thought are good things...But those good things brought with them great losses: the loss of people living together as a body, the loss of living for the common good, the loss of a sense of value for the past and for the opinion of others, the loss of the idea that there might be someone
somewhere wiser than you, the loss of our sense of need for others and others' need for us (3).

There exists in the literature a sense, or a hope, that a well-balanced individualism could help revolutionize the American Christian church, because, as Eric Jacobsen tells participants in Sidewalks of the Kingdom, “they [Evangelical Christian Churches] have picked up the individualism of our American culture and imported it directly into their churches and their theology” (2003: 52-53). Drawing a connection between Robert Putman's Bowling Alone and the American Church, Soong-Chan Rah in The Next Evangelicalism helps participants discover that,

Our church life becomes an expression of an individualism, yielding a self-absorbed narcissism. Instead of the church becoming an expression of a spiritual life lived in the community of believers or a spiritual life expressed in the context of a neighborhood community, our church life becomes a fulfillment of our individual desires and needs. Elements of the worship service, including the preaching of the word and the worship of God, become reduced to a form of therapy that places the individual at the center of the worship service (2009: 36).

Mission Year’s curriculum communicates that a rampant individualism, that is, an individualism transcending a healthy self determination, aids in the destruction of community in American culture. Furthermore, it has created the inability of the successful individual to see the advantages and privileges aiding his or her personal achievements, and consequently, giving him license to judge those who are less successful as failing as individuals. These myths, according to the Mission Year curriculum texts, having crept into the church, have distracted its members from living in spiritual community together and from expressing their spirituality in the wider community.

4.1.2 Participants’ perception of Individualism

The experience of living and working among those who have been oppressed by society’s individualistic perceptions has been an eye opening experience for most of the participants in the Mission Year program. Some had outwardly professed that they had individualistic attitudes before the program. James commented that,
I was always the person seeing the homeless guy with the sign begging for change and wonder why that lazy guy doesn't go get a job. Why is he begging for food? Why doesn't he just do it himself? But that's really changed now completely, I see it's not so easy to just get a job. Not only is it not easy to get a job, but to get a high paying job that is actually sustaining, where you can actually support yourself. My idea isn't so much now that it's the individuals' fault as it is now that the system is flawed. It's systemic racism (initial interview 2012).

Heather, as well, admits to having prior individualistic views, when speaking about addiction she said,

Honestly, I used to be of those people who just saw the addiction. But being in our neighborhood and seeing our neighbors, I realize the reason why they feel like that is the only option is that it is the only option that is presented to them. I mean everybody has a story and everybody has been through stuff. But when society has marginalized you so that you don't have a strong social support network to fall back on when things like your wife passes away and your house burns down and all of these really traumatic things that happen to people, then the alternative society presents is you go and you drink away your sorrows (initial interview 2012).

The experience of seeing and discussing their neighbors' (whom they now identify as their friends) predicaments, breaks through the cultural assumptions about the causes of poverty that participants brought with them to these neighborhoods.

What was once perceived as individual failure is now seen as complicated by a long history of injustice. Interviewees spoke about how there are few jobs in the city, that there is little mobility to access suburban jobs, and few employers want to hire people from those neighborhoods. City residents showed John that,

A lot of it is you make just one mistake and you're screwed. You make one bad financial choice, and because of your circumstances – you're kind of living in a poorer neighborhood – it ruins your life. Or you get out of jail, you're screwed, there are no services when you get out of jail, no one wants to hire you, no one wants to help you (initial interview 2012).

Yet Lillian discovered that it does not necessarily even require a bad decision; there are just simply few opportunities for the people who are in those neighborhoods. She explains that it is “just a lack of the right circumstances in life to set you up to be where you want to be. We weren't rich or anything but I at least had things going for me, like, I wasn't born in the world with everything against me already” (initial interview 2012). Yet, just as the curriculum readings suggest, individualism can choke community
and with that compassion. Living in community with the oppressed has given team members
compassion, for example, to see the injustice in addiction, which is not as obvious as systemic lack of
opportunities. Jen stated that,

When I came here that’s when it really clicked for me, this whole idea that people live
this way because they are choosing to live this way, they do drugs so that’s why they are
homeless, you know that sort of mind set. But for me it’s not that people are homeless
and poor because they are alcoholics, they are alcoholics because of the injustices that
were done to them, and it’s a continuous process (initial interview 2012).

Participants quickly learn that there are broader structural conditions that shape the decision-making
horizons available to residents.

Three participants directly mentioned, using various phrasing, that issues are not as simple as
they once thought. The decisions individuals make are complex. Joe learned this after forming a close
friendship with a man who was squatting in an abandoned habit house with 24 other people who he had
been moving around with on the streets for 19 years. Joe called them a “small little collective
community.” Joe’s friend was an addict whose one leg had become completely atrophied. The man
finally said he could not take it anymore and asked Joe to get him help. Joe set up a ride and all the
details to get him to a rehabilitation facility. When the day came for them leave, Joe’s friend flip-
flopped and eventually backed out saying he was just too scared. Recalling this, Joe stated,

It’s the first time it became clear to me that it wasn’t just walking away from the drugs,
he was walking away from everything. He had been with the same group of people for
19 years and if he left, he couldn't come back, there was no returning to this
community. And that’s a big thing. Maybe life wasn’t great, but he still had people. Just
understanding that there are so many issues at play here (initial interview 2012).

Joe’s story is emblematic of the picture of individualism laid out in the curriculum.

It appears that most of the participants began their Mission Year with an individualistic ideology
and a desire to help people get their own lives together. Learning from the curriculum that the difficult
circumstances people face cannot not simply be attributed to bad decision making while simultaneously
building relationships with inner city residents has created a shift in the way participants viewed
alcoholism and addiction, placing judgments on the complicated decisions people face, and assumptions that everyone enjoys the same opportunities and social networks to fall back on during hard times.

### 4.2 Isolationism

#### 4.2.1 Isolationism as a Concept in the Curriculum

Still residing in a poor inner city neighborhood, Mission Year staff member, Bart, is an active member of his community and is vice president of his community organization. As such he is well informed about the city of Atlanta. He connects the relocation of former neighborhood institutions to the poverty in two neighborhoods, South Atlanta and Lakewood Heights,

> ...there is a leadership vacuum that takes place...and it really spreads, it's not just about leadership, it's about economics, it's about homeownership, it's about taking ownership of the neighborhood and just the lack of that. For Lakewood, I think the big factor there, the big institution that left was the Ford factory that was in existence in operation for years...jobs just evaporated, so poverty just shot through the roof. So whenever a neighborhood is dependent on one institution, it's not uncommon really, when something like that happens it leaves the door open for a lot of misuse and abuse and neglect. Specifically, I know the story of homeownership in South Atlanta is a big piece of that. When you have professors and workers from the college [the Gammon Theological Seminary, formerly located in South Atlanta] that leave, they turn their previous properties into rental properties and sell them to people for less than they are worth and it just creates a devaluing of the community and like I said a lack of ownership (initial interview 2012).

While the movement of the factory and the Theological Seminary are lamentable, my first reaction to Bart's comment was that maybe it might not be so bad to have cheaper rental properties available to poor residents who cannot afford to buy. However, once again, these issues are extremely complicated. I gained a better understanding while listening to Shelly discuss the further isolation of poverty in her neighborhood, she said,

> Schools in our neighborhoods are going to be shut down [with the school district’s recent announcement of school closures due to demographic shifts], which means all the kids will be bused to different neighborhoods, which means people won't move into our neighborhoods, which means that our property taxes will go down. We won't be
able to raise the value of properties in our neighborhood because there are too many abandoned properties...We need people to move in because we need their resources, we need their property taxes, we need to be able to have our schools open...They are going to take all of that away. So as a community we are going to stand up and say this can't happen.

As residents of the inner city, these staff members can easily relate to the issue of isolationism as it is portrayed by the curriculum. The message participants receive from the literature, which is foundational in the three R philosophy and thus to the existence of the program, is that the abandonment of the city by white residents, business, and wealthier black residents has, in point of fact, contributed greatly to the poverty there.

Howard Thurman (1976), in *Jesus and the Disinherited*, refers to the biblical story of the Good Samaritan as Jesus responding to human need across the barriers of class, race, and condition. He claims that “Every man is potentially every other man's neighbor. Neighborliness is nonspatial; it is qualitative. A man must love his neighbor directly, clearly, permitting no barriers between” (84). Mission Year's curriculum touches on all the various aspects of the three R philosophy. Loving neighbors – responding to their human need, within the literature, means returning from isolation and living together once again (this concept of relocation will be examined more deeply in the next chapter).

One book in the curriculum, *Sidewalks in the Kingdom* by Eric Jacobsen (2003), is entirely dedicated to combating isolationism through the New Urbanism Movement which encourages city development that promotes walkability and mix use residential types, commercial uses, and community features. Jacobsen (2003) does not simply promote New Urbanism, he begs readers to view the suburbs as a failed experiment and return to the city. The book informs Christians, evidenced in the scriptures by the natural symbiotic relationship between city dwellers in the ancient city of Jerusalem and the rural dwellers of its rural surroundings, that there is no third option. Jacobsen (2003) asserts that,

An urban dweller supports the city by direct participation in its life and its rhythms. And a rural dweller supports the city by enjoying the culture that is produced in the city, by providing food and other resources for the city. What is most problematic with regard
to the city is suburbanization, which can drain the life out of the vital center of the city and doesn't support the city with any rural amenities (43).

He further states that policies of suburbanization, “cannot be our strategy...We can support the city from a truly rural setting, but we cannot retreat to our own private gardens” (45). Mission Year participants gain a better understanding of this concept of suburban draining of the city chapter two of *Restoring At-Risk Communities*, edited by John Perkins. Participants read that,

> The dollar circulates one time in the inner city: from the hands of the residents, into the hands of the store owners who live outside the community. Many of those businesses do not even hire anyone from the community, thereby extracting the financial power from the community with no benefit to the community except providing goods for consumption (Perkins 1995: 42-43).

The curriculum's message to participants about isolationism is that suburbanization creates need and poverty in the city because it extracts financial power from cities. Furthermore, since Christians are called to love their neighbor and care for the poor, then they must be informed that suburban isolation is more than simply being 'out of sight, out of mind,' it actually contributes to poverty and need. According to these texts, Christians must face the reality that deepening the poverty of the needy goes against fundamental Christian principles and teachings.

### 4.2.2 Participants' Perception of Isolationism

To a large extent, the participants’ reaction to isolationism is represented by the injustices they have observed in their neighborhoods. Some of the common responses to injustices perceived in the neighborhoods included: large trash piles, vacant/dilapidated houses, the absence of grocery stores, ineffective and overpriced public transportation, poor education system, no sidewalks, unlit streets, people pushed out by development projects, people forced to resort to prostitution and selling drugs, nothing for people to do, and people being identified unjustly from the outside. Participants' middle class neighborhoods likely do not suffer from such phenomena. By moving into high-poverty neighborhoods they experience a drastic change in living conditions and they realize that the simple
things they have taken for granted at home are not afforded to every tax-paying American, and that is not just. In fact, one noticeable difference between her home neighborhood and her Mission Year neighborhood stood out for Lori, she stated that “I was taught my whole life that the police were good. When I lived in that neighborhood I realized the police weren't always good. They can choose to pull someone over just because they are black, you know. I had never been a witness to that before. I got to see the kind of negative treatment of individuals in my neighborhood because of their skin color by police.”

Living in the city opened Joe’s eyes to his youth spent in isolation, what might be considered a hyper-suburban isolation. He recalls, “I grew up in a smaller town and church was a very big thing. My entire life I had gone to church. The school was at the church, everything I did involved that church. And that was the ministry and all that, just that small little collective. And that was something that never quite made sense to me.” The curriculum message that suburbanization creates need and poverty by extracting financial power from cities appears to have impacted all of the Mission Year participants I interviewed, evidenced by the physical conditions they have observed in the neighborhood.

4.3 Consumerism

4.3.1 Consumerism as a Concept in the Curriculum

The concept of consumerism holds a strong place in the programs’ curriculum. Christopher Heuertz (2008) reminds participants in *Simple Spirituality* of the biblical story of the rich young ruler who had kept all of the commandments since he was a young boy. Jesus told the man that there is just one thing then that he is lacking and that is that he should go sell all of his possessions, give the money to the poor, then come follow Jesus. Shelly told me that Mission Year inspires participants to question why they even want the things they want.
As Shelly sees it, real value is in living a lifestyle in which everyone flourishes. She wonders why satisfaction could not rather be found in “people finding joy” or safe and secure “places of belonging.” She proclaims that “we all live in this fear and I think that the way of Jesus is not to fear. So if I don’t hold on to this idea that I should have privilege and I should have wealth and I should have all of these things, then I won’t be so afraid of losing them.” Yet, Heuertz’s writings remind participants that as Christians, everything they own is given to them by God and belongs to him. Within the context of this reality he asserts that,

It seems to me that we are thieves when we hold onto those things that don't actually belong to us. It seems to me that God has intended some of “our” things for friends who are poor. It may be our education, our savings account, maybe even our ability to choose our occupation or the neighborhood where we live. Many times it's our very life. Could the things we value the most be occasion for biblical reciprocity – ways for the nonpoor to submit to those on the margins and in need? (2008: 121)

The literature selected by the Mission Year staff illuminates yet one more area where the American culture distorts the way in which the American Church follows Christ’s example of how Christians should live on earth.

Yet, the curriculum not only attacks consumerism’s ability to distract Christ followers from their responsibility to the poor, it also tries to defeat the idea that a consumeristic mindset defines being American. In Rah’s (2009) writings participants read his criticism of a Bush speech made in the days following September 11th, 2001. He recalls, “In the wake of the worst terrorist attack on American soil, my patriotic duty as an American was to spend money and consume consumables. To be a good shopper meant to be a good American.” Rah also makes participants aware of the effects this mindset has on immigrant communities. Having grown up in an immigrant Korean Church, he remembers,

The dominant culture’s values become the values that many immigrant groups try to emulate. Being a good Christian in America means being a good American Christian. Therefore, the value of pursuing a materialistic vision of one’s life gets confused with a vision of a healthy and mature spiritual life (2009: 60).
According to Rah, the cycle of the American culture continues with every first generation born in the United States and the perpetuation of consumerism is made complete, even by the church itself. Yet a large portion of exposing the realities of consumerism to participants comes from a documentary selected by the Mission Year city director, which follows some “post religious” Americans who have criticisms of their own about consumption.

What Would Jesus Buy (Herbes-Sommers 2003) is a documentary based on a comedic, sort of 'mock church' performance created by an activist group that performs all over the country holding “church services” with 50 members dressed as a church choir who are led by “Reverend Billy” who is dressed as a priest. Their “Stop Shopping Gospel Choir” sings about the evils of the retail environment. They call themselves a “post religious church.” Their message is to stop the “Shopocalypse,” or over-consumption, for the sake of the neighborhoods that malls destroy, the sustainability of the environment, and a living wage and safe working conditions for laborers the world over. One member of the Stop Shopping Gospel Choir said that prior to joining the choir, “I always thought protesting was marching on Washington, shouting with signs. But to do serious political work in creative fun ways is incredible, it’s like nothing I expected” (Herbes-Sommers 2003).

What participants first saw when viewing this documentary were real people unashamedly and, what I would call, vehemently proud of how much they buy their kids for Christmas. One woman was very concerned that her kids have all of the best stuff so their friends would be impressed, “I want them to have everything. I want them to have name brand stuff and all of the cool stuff” (Herbes-Sommers 2003). With little regret and a look that translated as 'don’t even dare to criticize me,' she held up the sliver of plastic and stated “this is a brand new [credit] card I received today. It will be maxed out by the end of the day” (Herbes-Sommers 2003). She also admitted that, as it does every year, it would take her husband and her until the following fall to pay off Christmas purchases. One young teenager in the film claimed,
I want to live in the mall. I could get whatever I wanted...I'm a pretty smart girl. I can tell when they're trying to get us to buy stuff, but then, I want to buy their stuff, so you know, it doesn't make a difference if it's advertised or not...If everybody buys it, then I am going to buy it. I just feel like you have to buy your clothes at a certain place or else you won't be considered normal. People will laugh at you. Rumors will spread. And that is a bad thing (Herbes-Sommers 2003).

Meanwhile the documentary gave viewers staggering statistics. One stated that in some countries it is illegal to advertise to children under twelve, while in America over 15 billion dollars is spent advertising to them. Participants also learn that while over 60% of Americans are in long term credit card debt, we live in a time that, for the first time since the Depression, household personal saving rates have dipped below zero. The documentary then moves on to speak with people who understand the evils of over-consumption in our society. One woman in the film expressed that,

> There are many places in America where there are no sidewalks. What does that say about us? It says we have to be either in our car or in our house or in the mall. There are only commercial spaces in almost all of America, [slight pause] or private spaces. You are either trespassing or you are buying (Herbes-Sommers 2003).

Nearing the end of the film was an excerpt from an actual reverend who said, “This consumer frenzy makes everything into a commodity, even Christmas, even Christ. The shopping mall is a symbol of everything that has gone wrong with Christmas. This isn't what Jesus had in mind for us” (Herbes-Sommers 2003).

Through the documentary in particular, the curriculum reveals how consumerism in the culture, including Christmas shopping and impressing other people with purchases, is driving people into unnecessary debt. Consumerism has become equated with Americanism, and that has defined being an American Christian. It has ensnared Christians into consuming well past their need, while others lack basic need.
4.3.2 Participants Perceptions of Consumerism

The experience of following the program rules helps participants realize that they do not need as much as they once thought. Having very little money, limited electronic media, no vehicles and no television for an entire year alone really shows them how much they can live without, while simultaneously they witness the suffering of their friends around them. Besides the staff members, only a few of the new team members directly mentioned consumerism. The winter break, however, did cause a few to comment on consumerism.

During the break, participants returned to their homes (generally in privileged neighborhoods) for Christmas. For the first time again they were back in the world they knew, but it was somehow not quite the same. After returning from break, Michelle noted that she had a different Christmas experience. She said that the idea of consuming less really resonated with her, she remembered,

When I went home for Christmas break I was like ‘I can't go shopping!’ It really hurt to go shopping because things were so expensive and I just don't need that stuff. My mind has shifted to where I can really separate my needs from wants. During the break I didn't buy anything for myself and I made people gifts. I definitely can see that shift happening (initial interview 2012).

Wendy, too, commented on this; she said “I now am able to see more how blessed I have been in my life. I was always able to go to the mall and get what I want. Just living on a budget, and going home and not being able to buy anything, has allowed me to see that I have spending habits” (initial interview 2012). One last participant also spoke of a change of heart about the subject. Lillian found that,

I had a real consumerist mindset. It makes me feel really good to buy things, so I buy too many things. And I figure there is a better way to live than feeling like if I just get this one thing then I'll be happy forever, and then doing it and not being happy forever (initial interview 2012).

There is a sense from my interviews that the curriculum message about consumerism was received even though it was not mentioned directly by most. The evidence is in the overwhelming desire by most of the participants to continue on as intentional neighbors and utilize their skills and time for less money or no money. Six of the ten new team members expressed that they plan to continue intentionally
neighboring in a city. The other four advocate intentional neighboring, but are uncertain at present because all four cited that their next step after their Mission Year is to pursue more schooling and they are not thinking too much further beyond that. I take the current situations of the past members I interviewed who are still currently intentionally neighboring in inner city Atlanta for five or more years as what I think the new members have in mind when they express a desire to continue to live this way. Past members are using their degrees at non-profits for less than the corporate world would offer, they own or rent houses in the inner city and own cars (one rides a bike everywhere but I am unsure if he also has a car). The past members all claimed the Mission Year experience changed the way they lived, including where they live, and how they shop. I will close this section by including a quotation from a past member, Lori, that I think exemplifies the way the new members who plan to continue intentionally neighboring feel about over-consumption, when explaining to me the ways in which she found herself changed by the Mission Year program she replied,

I don't have a TV still, I haven't had a TV since then, ya know. I don't know, it just changes the way you think about everything....buying clothes, the car I have, the way I spend my money, everything...And I forget that it's affected me so much until I interact with people, like people from jobs, they're like ‘What did you ask for for your birthday?’ and I'm like, ‘Well, I needed tea, so I asked for tea.’ And they were like ‘You asked for tea for your birthday??’ And one of my co-workers asked for this ring, like, this diamond ring eternity band or something like that. And I was like ‘Oh! I would never ask for that, I would never’ (initial interview 2012).

4.4 Racism

4.4.1 Racism as Expressed in the Curriculum

The three main curriculum books about racism are written by non-white Christians whose lives have intimately been affected by racism. Soong-Chan Rah is a Korean immigrant, Randy Woodley is a Keetoowah Cherokee, and Howard Thurman was an African American born in 1899 and cared for in childhood by his “maternal grandmother who had come through the fierce crucible of slavery while 'leaning on the lord.’” Soong-Chan Rah (2009: 72) informs participants that,
White people have power and believe that they think, feel and act like and for all people; white people, unable to see their particularity, cannot take account of other people’s; white people create dominant images of the world and don’t quite see that they thus construct the world in their own image; white people set the standards for humanity by which they are bound to succeed and others are bound to fail.

Yet, the curriculum does not stop there; it exemplifies this reality to participants by relaying some U.S. history that remains largely unknown to most people.

Jacobsen’s Sidewalks of the Kingdom jumps right into the topic of subsidizing sprawl in chapter one. Here participants learn the basics of any urban geography course, covering the Federal Highway Act of 1938, slum clearing, zoning to benefit the wealthy, and Federal Housing Authority (FHA) loans. Yet, Jacobsen's focus falls mainly on the destruction of the city and community living. This is not, however, an attempt on the part of the curriculum to sidestep the role of racism in this history. Highlighting that part of the story is another documentary, Race: The Power of Illusion, episode three, entitled “The House We Live In” (VanAlkemade 2007) which informs participants that race is not biological, but is rather embedded in culture, politics and economics. The documentary exposes participants to redlining (demarcating the areas of city maps where non-whites live and determining those non-white residents ineligible for services such as bank loans or insurance) and the “whites only” component to FHA loans (the Federal government encouraged banks to lend to white people by providing insurance for the loan). These federal policies allowed white people to begin wealth-building through ownership of property, while offering no other groups such advantages. Shelly commented that the information in this documentary always really “tears people apart” because they never knew about it.

Discovering this housing history presents to participants evidence of an unlevel playing field, that whites have created privileges for their own advancement in life – this phenomena is termed 'White privilege' (Tatum 1977). The curriculum materials imply that in many of the successes claimed by pulling oneself up by the bootstraps, the pulling apparently begins by first pulling open the door of
opportunity facilitated by U.S. government policy. The documentary concurs with Rah's (2009) point, stated earlier, that whites' create the standards for their own success and others' failure, yet, this is not only a modern occurrence. He writes that,

The American economy was built upon free land stolen from the Native American community, and free labor kidnapped from Africa. Our current economic success owes a large debt to an initial economic foundation built upon free land and free labor. If we live as financial beneficiaries in the twenty-first century of this system of injustice, we have a corporate culpability and responsibility, even as we claim innocence in our personal, individual lives (Rah 2009: 71).

The Mission Year literature suggests that change has not gone far enough in the U.S., particularly considering, as Shelly noted, many whites are unaware of their privilege. Yet, Tatum (1977) informs participants that change will only go far enough when people become actively anti-racist. She compares ongoing racism to moving on an airport conveyor belt,

Active racist behavior is equivalent to walking fast on the conveyor belt. The person engaged in active racist behavior has identified with the ideology of White supremacy and is moving with it. Passive racist behavior is equivalent to standing still on the walkway. No overt effort is being made, but the conveyor belt moves the bystanders along to the same destination as those who are actively walking. Some of the bystanders may feel the motion of the conveyor belt, see the active racists ahead of them, and choose to turn around, unwilling to go to the same destination as the White supremacists. But unless they are walking actively in the opposite direction at a speed faster than the conveyor belt – unless they are actively antiracist – they will find themselves carried along with the others...the relevant question is not whether all Whites are racist, but how we can move more White people from a position of active or passive racism to one of active antiracism? The task of interrupting racism is obviously not the task of Whites alone. But the fact of White privilege means that Whites have greater access to the societal institutions in need of transformation. To whom much is given, much is required (Tatum 1977: 11-12).

What is of particular relevance about such realities to these Christian participants who are trying to follow the bible as an example of how to live on earth, is that, as the curriculum suggests, allowing racism to remain embedded in society by using the liberal principle of individualism to excuse oneself from taking any responsibility in it, can be interpreted as sin. Rah (2009:44) proclaims that “...the primacy of the individual deepens the disconnect with social sin, particularly as it relates to race.” Given
that the bible has historically been used as a tool for racism in the U.S., the literature is designed to show participants a different (and in their minds true) interpretation of difference within the bible.

As an African American writing in the 1940's, Thurman (Thurman 1976: 29) recalls belonging to a generation that finds very little that is meaningful or intelligent in the teachings of the Church concerning Jesus Christ...The desperate opposition to Christianity rests in the fact that it seems, in the last analysis, to be a betrayal of the Negro into the hands of his enemies by focusing his attention upon heaven, forgiveness, love, and the like. It is true that this emphasis is germane to the religion of Jesus, but it has to be put into a context that will show its strength and vitality...

For all the misuse of the bible by any group for any personal agenda, one of the major goals of the Mission Year program is the realization of John Perkins' writings on racial reconciliation, which, to be sure, begins with the scriptures. The very nature of God, as a triune entity encompassed in the father, the son, and the holy spirit, is evidence of what Woodley (2001) names “unity in diversity.” He argues that since God created the world according to his own nature, the nature of the world and everything in it is meant, by design, to be diverse, yet unified. A unified but diverse pattern can be seen throughout all of creation. Woodley calls attention to the variety of birds, trees, animals and humans with their various “moods” during different seasons. He asserts, “God has set us in a very diverse world – but it functions in perfect unity” (Woodley 2001: 38). Yet, Woodley takes the discussion beyond diversity.

Woodley (2001) further states that God created ethnicity. He examines Acts 17:26 which states that “From one man he made every nation of men” (134). Woodley argues that “Our ancestor's ethnicity was not hidden from him, nor was their culture...The phrase he made every nation of men uses the Greek word ethnos for nations. In other words, God made our ethnicity (134).” He later suggests that God even foresaw culture. In his own words, Woodley theorizes,

God often instructed people to make memorials, for example, in order to remember something he had done for them. When we take a material object and give it spiritual meaning, then that object becomes a symbol. Part and parcel of every culture are symbols and how they are used (Woodley 2001: 134).
From this text, I see the focus on, what most Christians would agree is a basic foundational truth: that all humans were created in the image of God. Rah (2009:82) explains the precise meaning of the term, 

...the image of God means that 'we could search the world over, but we could not find a man so low, so degraded, or so far below the social, economic, and moral norms that we have established for ourselves that he had not been created in the image of God.

In Simple Spirituality, Heuertz (2008:54) participants read that, “The worth of a person is directly related to the fact that he or she is created in the image of God...People who are poor may live in undignified circumstances, but their intrinsic dignity can't be contested.” The curriculum aims to leave no other basis for ostracizing others.

Woodley (2001) discusses how the early Christians dealt with the differences in culture between the Jews and Gentiles. Since many Christians regard the first church, chronicled in the book of Acts, to be the model of how to live in community together as Christians, the story of what is called “The Jerusalem Council” displays a model for missions work. Woodley criticizes European and American Christian missionaries who consider their own style of dress more “Christian” than other places in the world, and proselytized cultural dress along with the gospel. Woodley (2001: 59) informs readers that, 

Such ethnocentric missionaries would have benefited from following the example set by the Jerusalem Council. I am more amazed each time I read the account in Acts concerning the council's decision not to try to force the Gentile Christians into the mold of Jewish law. A dispute had grown into a heated debate about whether or not the Gentile converts should be circumcised according to the Law of Moses. But the Council decided not to overburden the Gentile Christians with cultural nonessentials.

The curriculum urges that bible is clear in that all people, regardless of ethnicity and culture, are created in the image of God and deserve the same respect and dignity afforded any human on earth.

In sum, the curriculum's message about racism is multi layered. It is designed to uncover the hidden existence of institutionalized racism and white privilege. Furthermore, it suggests that there are two reasons no one is excused from the responsibility of becoming actively anti-racist. First, on a secular level, one gains economically from the system built on stolen land and free labor, and second, it is spiritually sin to participate in a system that oppresses others. The literature argues that this is true
because, like ourselves, others are created in the image of the God that designed the diversity in all things while intending there be a unity among them. This means that God condemns racism because it interrupts his system of unity in diversity.

4.4.2 Participant Awareness of Racism

Analyzing participants’ responses to racism frequently brought to mind the words of Kevin Spacey's character Verbal Kint, in the movie *The Usual Suspects*, who declared that “the greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist (Singer, 1995).” Overwhelmingly, most of the interviewees lived in what they described as a bubble, prior to Mission Year, where they believed racism no longer existed. Certainly, even fewer were aware of their own privilege accrued to them based on class and ethnicity. Heather expressed that,

> It’s really sad. Before I came to Atlanta I had no idea. I had read about it in the history books, but I had no idea how extensive the racial tension still is today. When I was growing up we read about the civil rights movement and the marches and I had an idealized view that people started living next to each other and being friends, I didn't know (initial interview 2012).

Meanwhile, some said they had not thought about racism at all. Lillian said that,

> Mission Year has made me think about race relations in a whole different way because, well, I never really thought about it I guess. I knew about the civil rights movement and all, but I never had a relationship with someone who wasn't my same race because the opportunity wasn't there. When I’d hear about race relations and politics I was like, I don't know, it really doesn't matter that much to me. But now it's a whole different thing (initial interview 2012).

The same was true for John who stated,

> I never really thought about racism before this year, you know, how it impacts and how it is embedded into the system. Where I lived was mainly White and it wasn't that big of a thing and not really talked about. I never really even thought about it. And now I'm like 'Whoa! It's embedded and I've never seen this before. How could I not have seen this before (initial interview 2012)?
Debbie remembered, “I totally saw gay rights or gender roles, but racism? I thought we were equal” (initial interview 2012). It does not, however, take very long living among inner city residents in Atlanta before one can really grasp racism’s legacy.

Mission Year did not necessarily make participants aware that racism is wrong (as presumably they knew that), but rather, it showed them where and how it still functions in our society and how to question their role in it all, as Tatum’s conveyor belt analogy suggests. Jen now understands that part of it, she asserted,

If you’re not saying anything, if you’re not actively being racist but you’re going with the crowd and you’re not fighting against it, you are still a part...You have to actively push against it, fight against what’s going on (initial interview 2012).

Similarly Joe argues that,

There is a dramatic inequality in our society at the starting blocks. When you look at the neighborhoods and the education and the investment, at the start, there is just a giant gap. So you have a large group of people who are starting at a massive disadvantage. So for me social justice is trying to combat oppression and the logic in our society that chooses to argue that we are a post racial society...we still have to be vigilant in fighting (initial interview 2012).

James, previously adhering to the myth of individual failure, now confidently claims that,

I think almost everything stems from racism. For poverty, it’s the racism. I feel like racism is the umbrella word for everything else. Like, why are there no jobs? Racism. Why does the education system suck? Racism. I feel like I understood it more once I got to Mission Year. There was always kind of this hint of it, but I was exposed to and really understood why this is the way it is once I got to Mission Year. You can't really escape it in this program, you're living in it and always experiencing it (initial interview 2012).

In fact, some white police officers told James that the only white people that should be in these neighborhoods should be cops. Yet, even more obscure than the hidden impacts of racist policy is the concept of white privilege. In fact, Mission Year staff member Bart explains that when most of the new team members first enter these neighborhoods, they struggle with the mistrust that people have toward them because “they are mostly young people of privilege and they've been able to operate freely under the assumption that 'everybody knows me and everybody trusts me'” (initial interview
James is now in a stage of processing and dealing with his whiteness, he commented that he became aware of white privilege when he moved into the unique situation in the Mission Year house, he stated,

It is three white males and four women of color and so being submerged into a house like that, while living intentionally and also reading books on racism, you almost have these feelings of guilt, like 'oh crap, I'm white and I'm a man, I'm heterosexual and a Christian! Man it's all going bad!' But it really made me think about what it is like to be a white person because I never had to think about that before (initial interview 2012).

Some past participants continue to recognize it after their participation in Mission Year is over. Debbie commented that, “I look at things in the past and I'm like, 'oh, that wasn't luck, that was white privilege'” (initial interview 2012). Of course, not all of the participants were white.

Some of the women of color in the program have long been aware of institutionalized racism and white privilege. Cheryl experienced that these phenomena...strip people of the very dignity that they deserve because they look a certain way or, if they are homeless, because they smell, or because they are a mom with four kids on the bus and they are loud. I think our preconceived notion of people really is an injustice (initial interview 2012).

However, any one of any color can enjoy privilege. This was learned by one of the other women of color in the program. Anne admitted that,

I am a marginalized people...I guess what changes with my perspective was I had to realize that even I have to give up privilege to be here. That seems so wrong to me because I don't feel like I have privilege but slowly God has been revealing that to me, exposing that. You know, I have a bachelor of arts, I have a degree, I have always had what I wanted and needed, like, that's privilege. I've always had a car, that's privilege. And to live here is to give up those privileges (initial interview 2012).

Even staff members, who have been trying to forfeit their privilege to intentionally neighbor year after year cannot escape it. Shelly helped me realize this when she told me a story about when a friend came to visit her in Atlanta and they took two of Shelly's neighbors with them on a day trip to Chattanooga. She explains,

So there's a walking bridge in Chattanooga and my friend and I are like, do we want to go? It's just a walking bridge, you know? Well, let's just drive by. I took a wrong turn
and we drove over a bridge and saw the walking bridge and my neighbors in the back we’re like, [all aghast and shouting] 'AAAAH, OH MY GOSH!!! THIS IS AMAZING. I'VE NEVER SEEN THIS MUCH WATER BEFORE.' And it was just the Tennessee River. In my mind I’m like 'oh gosh it’s just a river.' But for them? All we did that day was walk across the bridge, we didn't get ice cream or do anything exciting or anything that you or I might think was extra important to do. We just walked across a bridge, we went to a second hand book store, they got all the books from the free bin, we came home and she was like 'I had such a great time, it was so amazing to go to Chattanooga, Tennessee.' I mean I had a good time, I was relaxed, with my friend and all I did was share it with someone else. And my privilege stood out, it's like I totally know what it’s like to drive over a bridge of water. And that’s the thing, I’m living my life like 'Oh this is normal everyone knows what a bridge looks like, everyone knows what a boat looks like sitting on water,' but there are tons of kids in these neighborhoods who have never been beyond a ten block radius. So I am trying to teach people this while my privilege is slapping me in the face at the same time (initial interview 2012).

As reflected in Anne’s comment, privilege is a phenomenon that is not exclusively white. According to Shelly, living among the under-privileged continually affirms privileges she easily has taken for granted.

The curriculum message of racism and privilege was strongly received by participants. Many have had to face that what they have had the opportunity to accomplish in life has come at the expense of others. Although they came believing that racism was wrong, most were quite surprised to see its embeddedness in society where they formerly thought racism was nonexistent, or never thought about it at all because it was not a reality that ever touched their lives. Living in the neighborhood and experiencing the wake of racism has opened their eyes to how it operates in our contemporary society.

4.5 Church Failure

4.5.1 Church Failure Articulated in the Curriculum

It has already been established by the Mission Year curriculum thus far that the individualism, isolationism, consumerism and racism that shape American society have long been embedded in the American church. Most of the criticism by the authors in the Mission Curriculum falls both on individual Christians and by extension, the churches they make up. As such, church failure has been a continual theme throughout all of the previous sections in this chapter. Thurman (1976) is adamant that readers
remember that Jesus, meaning Christianity itself, is not to blame for the spiritual failings of his followers.

After a man in India respectfully critiqued Thurman's choice of adopting Christianity as his being a traitor to all dark peoples of the earth, Thurman (1976: 29) wrote,

> The basic fact is that Christianity as it was born in the mind of this Jewish teacher and thinker appears as a technique of survival for the oppressed. That it became, through the intervening years, a religion of the powerful and the dominant, used sometimes as an instrument of oppression, must not tempt us into believing that it was thus in the mind and life of Jesus.

The section provides evidence that the literature is suggesting the church must fall back in line with the teachings of Jesus and away from the American cultural values that contradict them. Beyond, yet also intertwined with, individualism, isolationism, consumerism and racism, the literature discusses issues of exclusivity and affluence (including consequences such as poverty).

Heuertz (2008) tells a heart wrenching story of walking with some friends and almost stumbling over an emaciated body on the sidewalk in Kolkata, India. Although, it is not uncommon to find bodies lining the streets in Kolkata, he explained, years of exposure to it never renders it less shocking. Heuertz (2008: 62) remembered, “the little person was underneath a dirty blanket covered with what must have been a thousand flies. From underneath the blanket and body, a three-foot trail of diarrhea ran toward the gutter.” After his friends helped him clean this man, Tutella Dhas, they took him away to Mother Teresa’s House for the Dying. As they took him away, Heuertz (2008: 62) said that,

> I lifted my head and caught sight of a church and its sign less than five feet from where we found the dying TutellaDhas. The sign read 'All are welcome here.' It may have been what inspired someone to drop Tutella in front of the church. But was he welcome? People from the church watched as we helped Tutella, yet the gate remained closed.

Heuertz is trying to express that, although the circumstances are different in America, the same types of exclusive behaviors are present in the American church. For instance, he writes,

> The faith of the North American Church has become very exclusive...How many of us wouldn't stare if someone who prostitutes walked into the sanctuary on Sunday morning?...Those who prostituted in first century Palestine felt as if they could spend time with Jesus – why can't they feel the same way with his followers?...Jesus came and ministered among those who were poor, with the poor, and as a poor man...As a
church, we must learn new ways to celebrate our faith inclusively so that those on the margins of society will feel welcome (Heuertz 2008: 68).

Exclusivity is closely bound to isolationism. Heuertz discovers that Jesus does not spend his time ministering to the upper class, educated, elite or socially influential. Yet, these are the very groups who, in suburbia, have isolated themselves from the groups that are socially or economically more similar to those Jesus actually did spend his time with – beggars, lepers, adulterers, tax collectors, fishermen, and the socially marginalized. Through Heuertz (2008), the curriculum communicates that perceptions of wealth have been mis-conceptualized within the church.

Heuertz puts his finger on a fallacious belief that has crept into American churches. He argues that,

There is a popular misconception that financial blessing is an indication of right standing before God. This leads to judgment that people who are poor are thus outside of right relationship with God. The assumption is made that when poor people are saved, their financial problems will be cured. Those who hold to this belief, despite its obvious flaws, isolate people who are poor by placing unfounded judgment on their spirituality... (Heuertz 2008: 72).

He outrightly calls this philosophy a “lie.” The curriculum here rejects the ideology that Hackworth has encountered in Evangelical rescue missions. For Rah (2009), the issue is closely related to consumeristic and individualistic mindsets saturating the North American church. He explains to Mission Year participants that the church is “captive” to consumerism and has sold its soul in exchange for the world's material affluence. Rah (2009:63) informs participants that “a market-driven church that appeals to the materialistic desires of the individual consumer has resulted in a comfortable church, but not a biblical church.” Thus, confronting “sins such as economic and racial injustice” costs people their comfort. Yet, Heuertz informs participants that the consequences are global.

Heuertz (2008: 73), using United Nations Development Program figures stating that 20 percent of world's population receives 82.7 of the total world income, enlightens participants to how far the consequences of church comfort reach. He begs that,
In a world where the chasm between the rich and the poor continually widens, it is critical that we in the church reach out in willingness to share the financial blessings God has graciously poured upon us...The church must redefine spirituality and seek a new understanding of holiness as it relates to justice. Part of that re-defining process must involve a reversal in our understanding of possessions. If the church continues to hold tightly to its material wealth, those in real and desperate need will continue to go without. Selfishness only contributes to the global disparity that excludes those who are poor, and in part defines as well as perpetuates poverty.

The literature is naming misinterpretations of affluence as a justice issue. The message Mission Year conveys through the literature is that the church is supposed to welcome all and care for the poor and oppressed. Furthermore, the curriculum divulges that the church has a responsibility to disrupt behaviors of exclusivity, oppression, and falsely judging the poor as spiritual failures while erroneously supposing one’s own affluence to mean they are righteous before God. What the authors have argued is that, in practice, the church, instead, has been quite complicit in reproducing the societal dynamics that produce a myriad of injustices.

4.5.2 Church Failure as Communicated by the Participants

Most of the participants were taking all of this new information very seriously. Since I conducted interviews only 5 months into the program, many were still in the process of analyzing themselves personally, trying to identify all of these phenomena in their own lives and behaviors. Discussion of the church came out in their future hopes of changing the church and when speaking of their home town and home church experience. The contradictions between individualistic liberal culture and the teachings of Jesus that the authors illuminate within the church seem to have been vaguely recognized, but not understood, by at least some of the participants while they were growing up in the church. Some, like Joe, who earlier expressed that he did not understand why the entire ministry of his church focused on serving its own little church community, have also expressed knowing that something did not seem biblical in the way church was practiced. Cheryl claimed that,
For me and my friends when we were in college, we just wanted it to make sense. We grew up in this faith, we grew up in this church, yet all of these injustices are happening around us in the world and that doesn't make sense. Like, what are we believing in (initial interview 2012)?

Yet, until she went to India and spent time in the slums, the way she and her friends reacted to the social injustices they learned of in college was reminiscent of the “comfortable church” that Rah described. Cheryl admits,

I went to a pretty white college, like, white middle class college, and we had this idea of social justice like ‘these issues don’t affect me,’ like poverty, world, hunger, prostitution, sex trafficking, none of this stuff affects me. But I can learn about it, make a face book group about it, join a little online challenge about it...It's very much like 'I can be involved with social justice from a far and still be comfortable' (initial interview 2012).

She joined Mission Year because she wanted instead to 'live out biblical justice.” For other participants growing up in the church, there existed some confusion surrounding how to be a Christian.

There apparently exists, for some Christians, a struggle to identify what their political beliefs should be as Christians. Some of the participants revealed that within their home churches there existed assumptions that Christianity fits best with Republican-party values. Joe had an experience while working at his volunteer site during his Mission Year that, in his words, was “a big deal for [him].”

He explains,

“...it was the election of '02 and I remember waking up and finding out Bush had won Georgia and had made some gains nationally and it was just this negative thing where I was working at and that's something I had never experienced before. My co-workers were all Christians and not Republican. It was things like that, like, I didn't realize that was possible. So I was beginning to see more of an emphasis on what Jesus talked about, taking care of the poor and widows and the less fortunate in society, those kinds of things with an emphasis on the gospels, and it was something that as a whole I hadn't been taught to focus on or had been really taught to deal with and even never thought about its existence in society on a larger scale (initial interview 2012).

Lillian’s story has a similar emphasis:

...there are one billion people living on less than a dollar a day, that's what I'd hear all the time. There's something wrong about that. I can't really envision someone living that way, and it's sad that I have so much extra and they don't have enough. Then I'm reading scriptures about caring for the poor. But there wasn't a lot of talk about that in my home church so I kind of felt like a weirdo for caring about it, I guess. The tradition I
come from really focuses on developing virtues within yourself personally, so I'm kind of from 'social justice is something liberal hippie people do.' I mean they care about it...but it's more about people getting saved and they see social justice as a different issue and it's not as related as it should be.

Lillian's home church experience exemplifies Heuertz's (2008) previously noted argument that many churches operate under the assumption that when poor people are saved, their financial problems will be cured. A shift has taken place in the conception of social justice for Lillian. She previously felt like a 'weirdo' for thinking about social justice and now expresses her intention to continue working toward justice as an intentional neighbor upon completion of her Mission Year. It is evident that the Mission Year program can instigate in some a shift in consciousness that different political values are possible for Christians.

The literature has made the argument to participants that the church, by assuming poverty is a result of lacking something spiritually has failed to recognize injustice as a cause of poverty. Most Mission Year participants have adopted this reality about the church as evidenced by their having gained new perspectives about the causes of poverty being rooted in a long history of injustice (as previously established in section 4.1.2).

4.6 Systemic Failure

4.6.1 Systemic Failure as a Concept in the Curriculum

Systemic failure in the curriculum appears to be designed to provide participants with the structural understanding of the causes of poverty and its perpetuation. Earlier in this chapter I discussed that the literature informs participants about the racist housing policies that precipitated the suburbs and left the inner city to decay from scarce resources, which is an example of systemic failure. In this section I examine further systemic failures as reflected in the Mission Year curriculum literature. Underlying much of the discourses found in the literature is that most systems in society are designed from a white or “Euro” point of view, such as the aforementioned FHA loans for whites only. Woodley
(2001: 101) claims that “systemic ethnocentrism is perpetual in governing policies (official or unofficial) that maintain an unhealthy ethnic or culturally biased status quo.” Some examples found in the book can be seen in the education system that is designed for Euro learners and hinders groups such as Native Americans who learn by experience.

Past systemic failures remain relevant because the consequences still remain with us, while new ways of reinforcing the very effects of those old policies are continually implemented. In Jacobsen's (2003) plea for New Urban community he begs that building up and sacrificing for community must be accompanied by institutional as well as structural change. What can be discovered from Jacobsen is that under-resourcing through isolation is preserved through opposition to annexation of inner-suburbs by cities and low-income housing policies. He attacks the suburban public outcry naming cities as power hungry when they propose to annex inner suburban towns. Jacobsen criticizes suburban dwellers for actively free-riding – taking advantage of the nearby city while contributing nothing to it. He argues that they have received places to play and shop, job opportunities, and a wealth of other amenities from the city. As such, Jacobsen argues that, it is more than fair that suburban dwellers should pay their share of the cost of an urban lifestyle through annexation. He also sees an unequal distribution of low-income housing as a problem. Jacobsen, who uses a redistributive concept of justice, claims that there are too few low-income housing projects going into wealthy areas. He proposes that an equal distribution may be the only workable solution in providing low-income housing. He appeals to the participants’ faith on the issue by writing,

...as Christians, this may be an area we want to adopt as one of our justice concerns and into which we should invest some of our moral clout. It is probably – in addition to being the right thing to do – the smartest thing for us to do as a culture (Jacobsen 2003: 151).

His suggestions are bottom up, meaning, he is calling for people to support institutional change, yet in the meantime, reject the status quo and implement the necessary changes of their own will with their own resources.
The Mission Year literature includes a book about welfare reform by Sharon Hays (2003) entitled, *Flat Broke with Children: Women in the Age of Welfare Reform*. She argues that welfare reform is ineffective because the legislation is founded on competing and contradictory visions negotiated by conservatives and liberals to satisfy their constituencies. The resulting work requirements placed on single mothers are for liberals a way of “transforming women who would otherwise merely stay at home and care for their children into women who are self-sufficient and independent” (Hays 2003: 19). For conservatives the requirements are a way to “teach women a lesson; they’ll come to know better than to get divorced or to have children out of wedlock” (Hays 2003: 19). Furthermore, Hays (2003) argues, two points which policymakers agree upon serve to bury welfare problems rather than solve them. They are, first, ignoring the structure of our economic, political, and cultural systems that create poverty, and second, treating raising children, wages, working conditions, and gender and race equality as “private” issues. Her suggestions for necessary institutional change, range from programs endorsing birth control, subsides for education, childcare, job opportunities, to a living wage through reassessment of tax breaks for the wealthy. Her in-depth examination provides another example of the role our political and economic structure plays in poverty as well as our blindness to it culturally. This understanding helps both deconstruct cultural notions of blaming the individual and offers political issues for advocacy should any Mission Year participants feel motivated toward the cause.

The curriculum aims at illuminating the complexities involved in the creation of poor disinvested neighborhoods, the perpetuation of poverty, and the existence of continued and embedded racism. Furthermore, the role that individualism and isolationism play in policy decisions is exposed, particularly in the work of Jacobsen (2003). It appears the role of the system in the Mission Year curriculum is to challenge the cultural perceptions of ‘the other’ that participants’ privileged (suburban) experiences offered them. It evidences some of the actual reasons for poverty and the complications poor people face in attempting upward mobility. The curriculum does not go very deep into the complexities of our
political and economic system. It does, however, provide some specific examples that support its cultural critique of individualism, isolationism, racism, consumerism and their embeddedness in both society and the American church.

4.6.2 Systemic Failure as Understood by the Participants

The bulk of what participants realized about the system has come from their experiences living and working in a high-poverty neighborhood. Furthermore, the concept of systemic failure has been introduced and discussed within the first five months, yet the more in-depth analysis offered by Woodley, Jacobsen or Hays had not been read by new members at the time of my interview. By that point participants’ exposure to systemic issues in the Perkins and Tatum books and in the neighborhood was enough for 3 of the 10 to have mentioned systemic racism, and 6 of the 10 to have mentioned lack of economic opportunities as injustices they have perceived as a result of participation in Mission Year. Although he might not know the term “neoliberalism,” John has witnessed for himself the oppression of the current economic structure. He expressed that,

The city kind of, not forgot about them, but doesn't really help them out...The streets are crappy, no sidewalks, the signs are down, it's not taken care of and you know it's because there are not a lot of taxes coming out of there. But they are still humans, it's a big injustice. Nobody cares about the neighborhood. They are going to put in a dome near us, a sports thing, and putting a Wal-mart. You can tell they are trying to turn over our neighborhood and just get rid of the people. They don't care, they want to just use it for space and they don't care how it's going to affect the people who are living there. If they build the dome it cuts off the neighborhood, in half (initial interview 2012).

Just the neglect of these neighborhoods alone by the city revealed systemic failure to participants.

In fact, of all 16 participants interviewed, 4 mentioned an abundance of trash piles in their neighborhood, 6 mentioned an extremely limited and costly public transportation system, 6 spoke about systemic racism in the neighborhood, 8 commented on the lack of jobs, 7 talked about how horrible the education system is in their neighborhood, 3 spoke negatively of the city closing schools in their neighborhood, 5 mentioned lack of something for residents to do (parks, community centers, etc.), and
4 people talked about their neighbors being born into a system that places them at a disadvantage from the beginning of their lives. Many of them mentioned the education system because they volunteer at an after school tutoring program. Heather observed,

The way the system is set up, it teaches kids what to learn rather than how to learn...The only learning you're doing is knowledge rather than learning to be analytical or coming up with creative reasoning...I feel to some extent their childhood is being robbed of them because they are having to do these knowledge-based type of worksheets and giving a kid a work sheet isn't going to make them learn what they need to learn other than regurgitate knowledge (initial interview 2012).

Jen was shocked that kindergarten kids were having six pages of homework at night to catch up, while James was discouraged when trying to help kids with homework who never had the book with them. He was appalled when he finally realized that, “the public school does not send the school books home. They are not allowed to take them home. I don't know if it’s because they are short on them or what it is.” It seems many of the systemic failures mentioned revolved around kids. Many realized the current political and economic structures provide little help for children in high-poverty neighborhoods.

Lillian, who prior to Mission Year thought that poverty was due to individuals' bad decision making, realized, after befriending a 20 year old who had grown up homeless most of his life, that “it’s nothing that he did that caused his life to be this way. You know if you grow up and your mom is homeless, chances are you’re going to be the same way or you’re not going to be given the same opportunities as other people” (initial interview 2012). Likewise, Sharon, who also blamed the individual for his circumstances before Mission Year, found that,

I volunteered in a GED program, a Boys & Girls Club, and a program for individuals who are homeless, and in those places I met people of all sorts of backgrounds who were often facing tough situations and trying to overcome obstacles. I saw that many of these obstacles were systemic and due to a society that doesn’t treat everyone fairly (initial interview 2012).

Sarah, who had some awareness of injustice from college yet still believed poverty was a mixture of individual failure and lack of opportunities, was surprised at the extent of systemic failure in the foster care system. She explains,
I see a lot of people stuck, they get into foster care, and I don't know how many stories I've heard of people getting abused in foster care since I've been here. People getting adopted and their adopted parents kicking them out like 'oh you're so much of a burden, you're going into jail, I don't want you anymore' and sending them back to foster care. It's like those kind of things are way more than I would have expected. And people getting raped and having that trauma in their life their whole life and they kept on having more kids and they are 18 and have four kids and still don't really know anything about raising a kid. Those things, where some kind of trauma happens to you early and you end up in a shelter when you are 20 because, what else is going to happen? There's no where to fall back (initial interview 2012).

Sarah's comment also reflects ways in which children in these neighborhoods are neglected by political and economic structures. What Sarah is saying is that she has discovered there exist large numbers of children with no families to support them, who, within the system designed to care for their needs, have been abused, put out on the streets, or raped.

What Sarah's quotation reflects is what Mission Year staff member Shelly suggested: that 80% of what participants learn comes from the city. They observe systemic neglect by simply looking at the physical attributes around them. Yet, they have also personally experienced the neglect as some have mentioned having to repeatedly call the city to get their recycling picked up and a broken street light fixed. Much of what they have realized about the system has come from the personal relationships with their neighbors and people at their places of work. From them they discover that the poverty experienced by people in high-poverty neighborhoods is often a result of circumstances that were decided for people at childhood and out of their control. The participants expressed a new awareness that there have been large groups of people in American cities who have began life systemically disadvantaged, and yet culturally blamed for their lack of progress in life by comparison to those to whom the system has secretly given tremendous advantages while ensuring that this secret remains unknown to them.
4.7 Relationships

4.7.1 Relationships as a Concept in the Curriculum

As one of John Perkins’ three R’s, reconciliation begins with building relationships between those who have suffered injustices and those who have benefited from the structural inequalities in society. Bringing justice to these high-poverty neighborhoods means bringing together people who have, knowingly or unknowingly, enjoyed systemic privilege, with those who have been systemically oppressed. The literature argues that this must be an essential goal for American Christians. Perkins (1995: 22) asks, “...can a gospel that reconciles people to God without reconciling people to people be the true gospel of Jesus Christ? Our love for Christ should break down every racial, ethnic, or economic barrier.” Thurman (1976) would likely agree that the true gospel of Jesus does reconcile people to people. He states that, “Sincerity in human relations is equal to, and the same as, sincerity to God...The insistence of Jesus upon genuineness is absolute; man’s relation to man and man’s relation to God are one relation” (72). Here the literature strongly suggests that following Jesus means relating to other humans in the way that Jesus did in the gospels. From Perkins and Thurman Mission Year participants learn that Jesus built relationships with the poor and oppressed. Furthermore, Jesus exemplified that relationships mean giving and receiving from one another when he dignified the socially marginalized Samaritan woman at the well, yet also asked her for help. He asked her for a drink of water. Rah (2009) warns that the power relation between giver and receiver where it is assumed that those with power and wealth will lead those who are without renders it impossible to see the dignity and worth of the marginalized. In our society today, the division between rich and oppressed poor often occurs along color lines (Thurman 1976, Perkins 1995). Relationships, participants discover from Tatum (1977), are crucial to fighting racism and colorblindness (taking an unbiased view about color which contributes to notions that racism no longer exists).
In fact, Tatum, likens relationships with breaking a silence. She insists that, “Once the silence is broken, the cycle of racism becomes increasingly visible.” She suggests that awareness often occurs when whites develop a close friendship or romantic relationship with a person of color. Yet, throughout the literature, discussions of injustice caused by individualism, consumerism, isolationism, racism, and the church allege that these phenomena, to borrow from Heuertz (2008: 58), “destroy the dignity and identity of our friends who suffer.” This implies Justice involves treating those who have suffered injustice with dignity, which requires the cultivation of relationships. Thurman (1976: 53) equates dignity with empowerment. He explains, “If a man’s ego has been stabilized, resulting in a sure grounding of his sense of personal worth and dignity, then he is in a position to appraise his own intrinsic powers, gifts, talents, and abilities. He no longer views his [inner] equipment through the darkened lenses of those who are largely responsible for his social predicament.” The Mission Year program promotes building relationships with neighbors and treating them with dignity. Yet, to do this effectively, according to Perkins (1995), requires living among the poor.

Relocation, as another of Perkins’ three R’s, is clearly the avenue the program advocates for building relationships. As previously discussed, Jacobsen (2003), too, has made a plea for Christians to return to cities. Jacobsen longs to see public spaces brimming with social interaction. New Urban development encourages relationships in community. He writes,

Living in closer proximity to our neighbors forces us to make compromises of our needs and wants – sometimes allowing us to learn the difference between the two. And as we navigate the delicate balance between our needs and those of our neighbors, we are presented with opportunities to take social risks and talk to our neighbors as we come up with mutually acceptable solutions. When we successfully negotiate these informal social contracts, what we gain – in addition to a satisfying solution – is a deeper and more honest relationship with those among whom we live. When distance and avoidance constitute our sole strategy for coping with our neighbors, this kind of character and relational formation never happens (Jacobsen 2003: 28).

Jacobsen touches on Harvey’s (2009) point (see section 2.2.2.3) that social Justice is contingent upon the social processes operating in society. What the curriculum is communicating to participants through
Jacobsen is that eliminating distance allows social interactions to occur that will culminate into the identifying and meeting of needs.

Overall the curriculum displays relationships as potentially helpful in addressing isolationism, individualism, and racism. A central message about relationships in the literature is that they reflect relating to God and following the gospel of Jesus. Participants also learn that dignifying the poor through relationships empowers the poor. However, most of what participants find out about the importance of relationships is through experiencing them with their neighbors. A major significance of relationships in the program is that through relating to their neighbors, participants will better understand all that they have been reading about individualism, isolationism, consumerism, racism, and relocation.

4.7.2 Significance of Relationships in Participant Conceptions of Justice

Some of the participants who have been through sociology, social work, or other programs at college were already aware of many of the justice issues that Mission Year aims to reveal to participants. Even within this reality, however, many commented that they really did not understand the issues until they came to live among and build relationships with the poor. The building of relationships was the one area that really shifted the definition of justice for participants. All of the interviewees recognized that building relationships was the way to give the marginalized their dignity, and that dignity was a right that all should enjoy. When talking about prior concepts of social justice before their Mission Year, most participants, ten of sixteen, had no full concept of it. Four gave statements that they previously viewed justice as universalized notions of equality and fairness to all citizens, as if by law. Furthermore, since participating in Mission Year, 13 people directly mentioned that they now believe that forming relationships with ‘the other’ is significant to achieving a just society. Only two participants, two of the
women of color, alluded to equality of resources and opportunities. One participant stated that sometimes justice means simply being with people. She explains,

> We ran into two homeless men and after that interaction I realized how much I'm trying to process through in my mind – redistribution and fulfilling of needs is really important. And when I was interacting with them I couldn't fulfill all of their needs, I had a snack in my back pack and was like 'hey, here ya go.' We could talk and we could be together and I could give him a snack, but that's not sustainable. I don't know where they are today, I don't know what they are going to eat today. So I guess for me this year I am realizing that I can't fulfill every need with every person I come into contact with but at the same time I can offer my presence and my conversation, my snacks, whatever it is I have in the moment and that's enough – to be with someone, to be with the homeless person, with anyone really (initial interview 2012).

Yet, relationships are not only one sided.

One of the important things that some participants have commented about is that the relationship breaks the power relation of giver to receiver. Jen stated that witnessing the true joy of having relationships with people and depending on people was “a really beautiful thing” to see. In fact, breaking down the power of the privileged giver and learning to receive from others is part of what the staff hopes participants will gain. Shelly expressed that,

> Most of my team members are learning what it means to receive from their neighbors. I purposefully never give them a ride to the airport. So I say, 'if you want to go to the airport you ask your neighbor to take you.' Or I will not help them get to the grocery store, 'if you don't want to take the bus then you need to ask someone to help you.' They are okay to ask me because I am above them, but to ask someone who they think is below them, there is so much more humility required because they are fighting this idea of 'I have so much more than you so I should be able to give to you' and the thing is, it's been my experience through my own choice in this living and as I watch my team members for the last six years do this, that every time they allow themselves to be given to that barrier, that idea that 'I am better than you' begins to be broken down in people’s understanding (initial interview 2012).

Joe learned this lesson more fully while continuing to intentionally neighbor after his Mission Year experience. He stated that,

> I was broke, I had nothing and I was completely dependent on the love and grace of the community of people around me. Having to do that and understanding how mentally and emotionally destructive that is was a profound experience for me...Just having to really be in need, truly for the first time in my life. I always said one of the keys about giving is you have to be able to receive. Being in a position of the giver is being in a
position of power. It's very easy to give because there's that inequality – 'I've got, you need, here.' But having to be in the 'you got, I need,' that's just a completely different ball game. When you are there you get a deep understanding of what it is like, the power that you have as the giver (initial interview 2012).

A profound change took place for Joe that would not have taken place outside of relationship. He also recognizes the power that inner change can have on wider society.

Many of the participants expressed belief that the relationships they have formed during their Mission Year experience have helped them gain a new perspective on poverty causes and injustice, and furthermore, that both this new perspective and the relationships themselves can effect change. Joe stated that,

I think it's [building relationships and treating people with dignity] very important because it helps give you a new understanding and a new perspective. That's how you learn and understand. It's how you can effect change – being able to help and encourage one kid and help one really struggling family and at the same time, like, also need that help as well (initial interview 2012).

Yet, he is not the only one. John, after explaining how joining Mission Year allowed him to see that injustice is embedded in both the political and economic systems, he expressed his thoughts on possible solutions. He remarked,

Well, I see it as the people form how the system works, so it is more on a personal level. Like the people that live in the suburbs who think these [inner city residents] are just crazy people. They are the ones who form the system that oppresses. So I think living with people, offering them dignity and love is more powerful and I think it will spread and will affect the system (initial interview 2012).

Likewise, Lillian, when speaking of systemic change, asserted that building relationships is a “step in the right direction” (initial interview 2012). Sarah mentioned that, “I think in treating people with dignity you fight injustices or help them heal from those injustices” (initial interview 2012). One aspect, however, about building relationships with the oppressed is that they enter one's personal circle as friends.

The main reason participants believed relationships will achieve a more just society is because people will actively respond to injustices that are harming their friends and loved ones. Sharon
experienced that, “...forming relationships with people who suffer injustice plays a huge role in seeking to achieve social justice. Putting a face to an issue makes it so much more personal. When you get to hear someone’s story and develop a relationship with her, you want the system to change because it will affect your friends, your neighbors.” Shelly explains how the dignity in a relationship makes a difference,

So that’s where dignity comes in, it’s not like, ‘these people need my help,’ it’s like ‘my friend needs my help,’ she needs my resources...I don’t give money to people I don’t know. Then I’ll feel good about myself if I give you money, then it’s more about me than it is about them. But if I’m doing something because I really care about someone there is a really big difference in that. Offer them dignity because they are not just some project, but because of your relationship (initial interview 2012).

For all participants in the program, developing relationships with neighbors became a key element in addressing injustice for several reasons. First, resources may become more evenly distributed when privileged individuals will use their resources (including their privilege) to advocate for a change in circumstance for their friends who are poor and oppressed. For example, privileged people may use personal connections or business connections to draw investment opportunities and jobs to the neighborhood or to help find employment for a friend. Another example can be seen in the civic actions of Shelly in her fight to help her neighborhood keep its school open. Second, as more privileged people choose to intentionally neighbor, they may instigate support for high-poverty neighborhoods from their social networks back home in the suburbs. As intentional neighbors share their experiences and the experiences of their neighbors with their suburban friends and family, a slow change in perception of the causes of poverty and injustice could take place on a wider scale. This has the potential to precipitate future systemic change. Finally, dignity can be returned to people in any given moment through relationships, regardless of the continued culture and system that denies those things – there is no need to wait for the system to change to offer people dignity.

For Mission Year participants, justice for the oppressed can only begin by knowing the story of oppression in the United States, a story that finds the dominant group controlling the political and
economic power to create spaces of privilege for themselves. Taking this privilege comes as others are left with no political or economic power over their own spaces. This part of the story involves isolationism and racism. These realities are covered up by a cultural individualism that, on one hand, masks privilege and in its place puts forward a lie that the privileged have worked single-handedly for everything they have accomplished, and on the other hand, hides oppression through fallacies that other groups have done these things to themselves through bad decision-making. This process strips the poor of their dignity and categorizes them as deserving of poverty because they do not “work hard enough.” Isolation perpetuates this story because few have actually experienced spaces of oppression. Yet once Mission Year participants relocate to spaces of oppression and form relationships with the oppressed, they experience a knowing that leads to doing.
Participating in Mission Year requires a certain amount of “doing” up front. Participants move to a new geographical location for a year, work for free at a volunteer site 30 hours a week, live minimally, open their house up to neighbors, and spend time forming relationships with neighbors. Yet, without the perception shifts I have discussed as “knowing,” one could finish the year and simply return to status quo living. Achieving a more just society begs that one must continue a lifestyle of such “doing.” The knowing that the program promotes is meant to inspire doing. Since any one person is powerless to change the system, then they must do what is within their power to do now – contest the status quo and walk faster than the conveyor belt and in the opposite direction. The term that came up continually in interviews with staff members, past members and new participants was that doing this work is “living out justice.”

It has been established by the curriculum and evidenced by scripture that individualism, consumerism, isolationism, racism are not only unjust, but unjust biblically. Therefore, Christians are called to live out biblical justice. Thus, if justice is knowing that isolationism and rampant individualism are wrong, then the doing that reverses their ill effects is relocating and building community. Likewise, if knowing consumerism is destructive, then doing justice is living in simplicity with only what you need and sharing extra resources with those who are in need. Furthermore, if white privilege and systemic racism are oppressing groups of people, then reconciliation between groups through relocating and living in community with other groups is where justice begins. From here justice is lived out by serving the people through submitting one's resources and privileges for the betterment of one's entire shared community.

The plea that this Christian organization makes to Christians to 'live out' biblical justice is reminiscent of human geographer Paul Cloke's call to geographers to 'live out,' in their everyday life practices, the geographies they write and talk about. He argues it “would entail a continuing
engagement in collective political action against ordered evil. Equally, it necessitates processes and practices which add up to a taking responsibility for what we have been made to be and for who we are becoming” (Cloke 2002: 602). Justice as knowing is participants taking responsibility for what the American culture has made them to be – individualistic consumers removed from the oppressed. Justice as doing is participants taking responsibility for who they are becoming – humble, compassionate members of a community of need working for neighborhood change. In this chapter I will discuss justice as doing as relocating, building community, serving the community, living simply, and the spirituality that supplies these Christians the strength to continue “living out justice.”

5.1 Relocation

Relocation, as the first of John Perkins three R’s, is the beginning of living out justice in the United States. Perkins (1995) reminds participants that, “Jesus relocated. He became one of us. He didn’t commute back and forth to heaven...By relocating, we will understand most clearly the real problems facing the poor; then we may begin to look for real solutions. For example, if our children are a part of that community, you can be sure we will do whatever we can to make sure that the children of our community get a good education.” Relocation is also at the heart of Jacobsen's (2003) vision for New Urbanism in the city. Yet for him, the motivation behind relocating is the building of community. Thus, the literature takes relocation as a foundational given, introduces the concept of it, then turns its energy toward making a case for building community. Remove relationships with the poor and community building out of relocation and one is simply left with gentrification. The goal of living out justice is living among the poor for the benefit of the poor, not displacing them.

Heuertz (2008) asserts that a community has no credibility unless it makes room for the poor. In the strategy of building relationships with the marginalized in shared community, I find answers to Young, Fainstein, Fraser and Purcell in their call for equal participation in social processes. Developing
this type of community is unlike the typical case studies, such as those done by Hankins and Powers (2009) and Fainstein (2010) where the low-income housing promised in supposed mix-use development projects never is actually affordable for anyone with a low income. Intentional community is designed to combat isolation, and naturally, the individualism that validates an individual's right to isolate. According to many of the authors included in the curriculum, community is the solution to such exclusivity. Jean Vanier (1989: 16-17) explains to participants that,

'My people' are my community...There is a solidarity between us. What touches them, touches me. And when I say 'my people,' I don't imply that there are others I reject. My people is my community, made up of those who know me and carry me. They are a springboard towards all humanity. I cannot be a universal brother or sister unless I first love my people.

He then goes on to say that we are all parts of a whole. This ties in closely with the literature that argues we are all created in the image of God. Some authors call for building community in a disinvested neighborhood, some for a community of human-kind, and others for a Christian community of Christ followers.

There is a definitive call throughout the curriculum literature to live in solidarity, sharing community with the poor and oppressed. Yet, there is also an argument for Christians to live in better community with each other than has occurred since individualism has taken the church captive. Rah (2009:33) claims that individualism in the church is not in line with the biblical example of community. He insists that,

An overwhelming number of books in the bible are written to communities: the people of God, the nation of Israel, the church in Colosse and Corinth, the seven churches in Asia Minor, etc. Yet, why is it that our reading of the text centers so much on the individual reading of scripture versus a corporate reading as the overwhelming majority of the scriptures demand?

Christians in healthy community together impacts social justice for the poor and oppressed because community precipitates accountability to live out justice as exemplified by Jesus and scripture (Heuertz 2008).
Perkins' three R philosophy theorizes that relocation and reconciliation will culminate into a redistribution of resources that empowers the poor rather than victimizes them. He argues that, “It is not taking away from the rich and giving to the poor. Rather, it is when God's people with resources are living in the poor community and are a part of it, applying skills and resources to the problems of that community, thereby allowing a natural redistribution to occur. Redistribution is putting our lives, our skills, our education, and our resources to work to empower people in a community of need. Christian community development ministries find creative avenues to create jobs, schools, health centers, home ownership, and other enterprises of long-term development.” By relocating, one can apply the same energy and skills one once had in one's suburban communities to a neighborhood of need, thus empowering the incumbent residents to participate in the transformation of the community to one of opportunity and beauty.

In this way, the Mission Year curriculum literature proposes a solution to poverty that many of the authors feel can operate in the current economic structure. Institutional change is not first required. People take action now while clinging to the possibly their actions may one day instigate wider change. This is reminiscent of Susan Fainstein's (2010) idea, discussed previously, that there are “many different capitalisms.” Furthermore, the Mission Year curriculum insists that Christians must embark on such action because only collectively can they persevere in living out biblical justice and that biblical justice means that communities must embrace the poor. Suburban communities are not credible because they do not make room for the poor.

Since there are only two houses, participants living in the same house had the same stories to tell about the beauty they found in doing community. I repeatedly heard about one man who sat on the porch of the Polar Rock house every day while the participants were away for Christmas. As one participant phrased it, he told them, “I didn't have anything to do without you guys here and I didn't want anyone to mess with your house” (initial interview 2012). Others talked about how a lot of the
neighbors come by just to check on them. Many participants told stories about how their community dinners brought people in the neighborhood together. One participant, remembering community dinners of her past Mission Year in Philadelphia, said...

...three older women would show up from up the block. They never knew each other before that. One lived diagonal from us, another a few houses down and the other just a few houses down from there. They had never spent any time together but they just started coming to our house and that sort of became our crew. I remember one time in February the snow had hit real heavily and one of those ladies came over and brought us a bunch of food because we couldn't get to the store. We began this relationship with them and needs were met. I mean these are really basic things but you start to look at the power of relationships and the power that you can have when you just learn to rely on each other (initial interview 2012).

Likewise, Sarah expressed that “We just play cards, we play spades, one of our neighbors taught us, and it's neat to see how different neighbors have met each other through us.” Lillian as well noted that “It's been fun to be a part of building community on our street. People didn't really know each other and now they do a little bit.” Experiencing community in this way was new for most participants, and something they all expressed they want to continue doing in the future.

The action of building community through forming relationships in a high-poverty neighborhood has changed most participants' perception about how to live their lives ranging from geographical location to their notions of privacy. As Lillian explains, “In the past I was fine with not interacting with people that I didn't know.” The raw enthusiasm about their neighborhood relationships in their Mission Year neighborhood, their shift in perception on causes of poverty, and their desire to continue intentionally neighboring displays participant support of Perkin's three R philosophy as the right thing for Christians to do to combat poverty. It can be evidenced in the ways that past members continue to serve their inner city communities with their resources and the ways in which new members dream of serving a high-poverty neighborhood in the future.
5.1.1 Service

Serving the community after relocation is key to precipitating the natural redistribution as theorized by Perkins (1995). Heuertz reminds Christians that their life is not their own, it belongs to God and should be used serving God. The Mission Year curriculum literature also made the argument that serving God means serving the poor. All of the past members with whom I spoke are currently serving the poor through relocation. The new team members are exposed to the life-style of intentional neighboring through knowing past team members, many of whom are on staff at Mission Year. They have also met many other past team members who come out in support of Mission Year at fundraisers or other various Mission Year events or gatherings. Some volunteer at sites where past members may also be present. They witness how redistribution through relocation operates. One staff member has used her Master’s degree in exercise science to open a non-profit gym that serves the English Avenue neighborhood. Another past member started a coffee and pastry shop in another inner city neighborhood that serves, among other things, as a place for teenagers and residents to socialize. Investing in the coffee shop in an under-resourced neighborhood combats the problem some of the team members noted – that kids get in trouble because there is “nothing to do.” Although Harvey’s argument that capital will flow without regard to persons or territories is usually a reality, these examples display how a shift in perception can cause people with resources to invest with very specific regard for persons and territories. New team members are already dreaming up ways that they might invest resources in a neighborhood when their Mission Year program is complete.

When explaining to me how the Mission Year program works, Sue mentioned how new team members usually develop a passion about certain injustices they have witnessed. She explains,

So I really have a passion about reconciliation. Other people are about education, others about transportation, or immigration. It’s interesting to see how people’s hearts change to a different thing, but as a team together, there might be five different people whose hearts have been called in five different directions but all for justice, and all working together as a body of Christ in this neighborhood (initial interview 2012).
In speaking with new team members, I have found that Sue’s characterization describes the two Mission Year houses. However, I’ve also discovered that past team members who are currently intentionally neighboring and new team members in designing possible future plans, alike, all try to couple their desire to live out justice with their other personal interests in life, such as the opening of the gym. For instance, Heather, who expressed an interest in continued intentional neighboring, stated that,

One thing I was really passionate about before coming into Mission Year was the injustices to undocumented workers...I have been speaking Spanish for a very long time and one thing I really hope to do in the northwest [United States] is to seek out relationships with Hispanics and with neighbors who may not have an up to date visa or may be in the process of getting a physical so they can get a green card, that sort of thing (initial interview 2012).

Similarly, Sarah said,

I want to go back and get my Master’s [degree] in social work. Probably in the next two or three years I will do that – I don’t want to right after Mission Year. I definitely wouldn’t be content moving back to the neighborhood I grew up with. If anything, I want to go to churches and be like 'what is your outreach?' And even do that kind of planning in churches. And maybe be a consultant helping churches who have money go 'what are we using this for, we are pouring all of this back into ourselves and not doing anything with it.' Because that happens a lot (initial interview 2012).

Almost all participants are reassessing their plans. John, who pre-Mission Year thought the future might have included helping run his family's business, now wants to get involved in a community, possibly start a woodworking business there, and hold free woodworking classes for children. Debbie is a past member who is intentionally neighboring and going to school for nutrition, which she hopes to use to serve in the neighborhood when she graduates. One new member wants to use her skills as a speech pathologist in an “at-risk” community. She expressed a desire to provide services “not just to people who need those services but to people who need them and are not getting them because of where they live. So my dream is that we will live in areas like that where we can make that happen.” Joe, however, has made a career out of service.

For Joe, social justice
tends to influence what I do and what I get involved with. I try and find organizations that are run by minorities and come along side and support them and work underneath them. You don't see a lot of that, you see social service organizations that are run by white men. I try to find a way to partner with minorities and women and so forth that are doing powerful and positive work. Because generally in society you don't encourage that or even look at the landscape that predominantly in leadership of everything there's a white man. So I'm trying to find ways to support the deconstruction of that (initial interview 2012).

Since the completion of his Mission Year experience, Joe has been volunteering at numerous places around the city for several years, most of those years without pay. He now works for four organizations and, for the first time is getting small amounts of compensation for all of his jobs. He works at a summer camp that hires 15 to 18 teens every summer. Joe serves his community by offering those job opportunities to the kids in his neighborhood. Although past members are incorporating their own passions into the neighborhood, it remains that service is sacrifice. Joe's life choices represent how relocating, building relationships and serving in an under-resourced neighborhood do not result in the socioeconomic maldistribution and cultural misrecognition that Fraser and Young have written extensively about but rather contest them.

Participants have mentioned a desire to forfeit or give up privilege. Although they we very impacted by the realization that privilege has come to them at the expense of others, sacrificing privilege on behalf of the poor and oppressed is no simple task. James told me that,

> It's not like you should hate yourself for being white, but just realize that being white and having that privilege, you can turn that around and not use it to gain more power and gain more advantage but use it in a way that advantages the oppressed and the poor and people who don't have that voice and that power – use it in that way, in a positive way (initial interview 2012).

Lillian wants to actively sacrifice privilege because she strongly desires that others have the same things she does. Sarah expressed that,

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Sacrifice may be a concept that human geographers should pay more attention to. This research has made me question if there is not a season for different geographies. It may be that moral geographies would be necessary for a time to set right the playing field, while a more institutionally heavy solution could hold the field level once established.
I have an education, I have the ability to meet people and connect people, like networking skills and I just feel like I'm very privileged and have a lot of gifts that I can use and help people who don't have those things (initial interview 2012).

Another area of sacrifice involves how past members have forfeited higher paying jobs because they did not want to provide services for people of privilege. Some past participants have sacrificed tens of thousands of dollars in income in exchange for lower paying non-profit jobs where they can use their skills serving the poor and oppressed. In fact, the staff member who opened the non-profit gym left working as a conditioning coach for two National Championship tennis teams to work for Mission Year and fulfill the dream of opening a gym for low-income people who have little gym access. She explains,

I worked full time basically as a strength and conditioning coach for really amazing athletes for two years, and doing that post Mission Year made me really realize that that's not the population I want to serve. I want to serve a more underserved population. So upon graduation I turned down jobs... (initial interview 2012).

Volunteering and serving were already activities that participants engaged in before Mission Year and likely would be something they continued to engage in if they had never joined Mission Year. However, what has shifted in these faith workers is how they serve the poor. Evidently most participants adopt the philosophy that relocating and building community in under-resourced neighborhoods can produce a natural redistribution. Relocating changes the way service is done. Rather than go on short term, week-long mission trips or commute from the suburbs to volunteer at inner city nonprofits, as they once have done, participants now express their intent to relocate and serve in shared community by sacrificing higher paying jobs, quiet and safe suburban experiences, and power through privilege.

5.1.2 Simplicity

As referenced above, biblical justice means actively refusing to participate in cultural activities that create injustice. Rah (2009) joins Woodley (2001) in arguing that the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 sets a biblical example of the importance that Christians do not allow their culture to distort the gospel message. Heuertz (2008: 87) informs participants that,
Too easily and too often, we spiritualize Western forms of Capitalism and demonize socialism to justify over-consumption and unresponsiveness to the global demands of justice and equality. We theologize material provision as 'God's blessing' while failing to recognize that perhaps the material provision placed in our trust may, in fact, be intended to advance God's Kingdom or benefit someone else, like the women who funded Jesus' ministry or the man who provided Jesus' tomb.

In response, doing justice also requires adopting a life-style of simplicity. Heuertz begs that the American Christian culture distracts Christians with a focus on what they give, rather than what they keep. Furthermore, he assures participants that, “poverty is often chosen for someone; simplicity has to be chosen by someone” (Heuertz 2008: 96). For Heuertz simplicity is a matter of questioning what we have, want, or need.

Heuertz (2008) suggests the questions may stretch further, asking what others do not have, want, or need. Simplicity for the past members currently living as intentional neighbors is not nearly as extreme as the minimalistic living current team members experience as part of the programs rules. New members are working for free at non-profits and living on $17 a week for food, while most past members are working for some pay at non-profits. Likely each individual, upon completion of the program, will define simplicity differently as intentional neighbors (some past members have cars, one rides a bike). Some new members disclosed that minimalistic living was at times difficult, but they believed it to be a good experience for them. The overall impression I gained from my interviews with participants was that most intended to own at least houses and cars, while utilizing their education and skills to make a decent living. One of the women of color mentioned that the minimalistic living made her realize that she wants a lot of resources so she can share them with others. Most have expressed a desire to reside in poor inner city neighborhoods, and they plan to invest their resources into the poor community.
5.2 Spirituality

Living out justice as suggested by the Mission Year program is not as simple as reading some books, understanding American culture, church and poverty better, relocating to an inner city and doing justice. The participants emphasized that this is work is difficult. James admitted that, “at times it can be hard to love people and you get these judgmental ideas. It's really hard and I need a lot of grace for it – from my faith and asking God to help me love people and especially serving in a under resourced and poor neighborhood.” Jen told of one of her experiences,

I mean I stand out, and I've felt the stares and I've felt the glances and glares, I know. It's difficult for me. One time I got off the bus and I just started crying, I was like, 'what have I done? I've done nothing, I don't deserve this'...They have been severely oppressed by people of my color and so they don't trust me and they see me as this bad person because of what I look like (initial interview 2012).

Although, she now understands the reasoning behind these attitudes, relocation may involve living around people who will not trust you.

In Chapter 6 of Restoring At-Risk Communities, a chapter written on reconciliation from both a black and a white perspective by Spencer Perkins and Chris Rice, some obstacles of reconciliation are presented. Perkins explains that,

Blacks easily talk about what's wrong with White Folks and are understandably concerned about racial discrimination. But we are often reluctant to forgive and begin to trust. Sometimes we even use race as a weapon to keep Whites at bay. But while minorities are very concerned about racial justice, we are not – to the surprise of many White Christians – very interested in being reconciled (Perkins 1995: 121).

Perkins discusses that reconciliation is a struggle for Blacks as they have experienced “bitter encounters” with racism. As an advocate of the three R philosophy, he urges people to overcome their anger and bitterness by adopting forgiveness. However, Rice describes that,

As the majority culture, we don't have to deal with race. We say 'I don't see color,' but the reality is that we don't have to see color. I can walk away from VOC [Voice of Calvary ministry] and Black people and the whole mess of race anytime I like. I can cross town tomorrow and enter the White world and know I will be treated well and not be denied opportunities because of my color. But my Black friends don't have that option (Perkins 1995: 117).
Given both perspectives, according to the Mission Year curriculum and the experience of its participants, reconciliation between blacks and whites in the United States is a struggle that requires patience, forgiveness, compassion, and humility to overcome.

As most of Mission Year participants are white, and certainly all have experienced some privilege, intentionally neighboring in an area of high crime and violence where, besides their close neighbors, they may not be liked or trusted by other residents. In fact, Bart expressed that for new team members there is

...a huge hurdle to overcome, assuming a team member is white and they’re coming into a neighborhood that is mostly African American, automatically there is a built in level of mistrust, and in order to overcome that, it requires a person to be exceptionally humble, and patient. And that’s not easy because a lot of our team members haven’t had to do that. Because they are mostly young people of privilege... (initial interview 2012).

To be sure, many must at least entertain the idea of giving up and returning to an easy life of privilege. I have found, through both the literature and discussion with the participants, that the strength to continue in this work comes from an inner transformation of the self by spiritual means. That is, becoming more patient, forgiving, compassionate, and humble through prayer and relationship with God. Thus, the 'knowing' discussed in chapter 6 is a change in perspective, but the 'doing' requires a change of heart. In The Way of the Heart, Henri Nouwen (1981) explains to participants that transformation comes from time spent in solitude. Nouwen (1981: 22) writes,

Solitude is...the place of the great struggle and the great encounter. Solitude is not simply a means to an end. Solitude is its own end. It is the place where Christ remolds us in his own image and frees us from the victimizing compulsions of the world.

He argues that Christians gain a new inner disposition from facing their own anger and greed while in solitude. Thus, solitude is where anger and greed are broken and a new compassionate self is found. This idea of change within the self was evident in discussion with participants.

In a sense, participants are connecting themselves with injustice because they are connecting injustice to humanness. Nouwen (1981: 25) writes, “In solitude we realize that nothing human is alien...
to us, that the roots of all conflict, war, injustice, cruelty, hatred, jealousy, and envy are deeply anchored in our own heart.” One of the women of color, Cheryl, told me that,

When you see the injustices clearly on the street or in the breakup of neighborhoods, the root of that injustice is in myself...the reasons for that injustice are power and control...I am controlled by power too. I may not ever be enforcing a system on someone but I've manipulated relationships, yeah, I've really desired control for things in a not pure way and hurt people in the process and hurt myself. It just started to connect that the brokenness of the world is the brokenness of people. We are broken people and we go out and make these broken systems (initial interview 2012).

Participants find they have a responsibility to grow spiritually and as a person. Lillian expressed that from Mission Year,

I've learned a lot about myself and the way I process information and deal with people. I'm trying to change that and I think that's a pretty fundamental thing about me. So hopefully if I can change some of the destructive ways that that happens, it will change who I am a lot in a better way (initial interview 2012).

Staff members confirmed that self-awareness is a part of what they hope team members will engage in during the year.

Shelly told me that as staff members they are,

Looking and seeing our team members, seeing the dynamics of the group, seeing how they are responding to interacting with people of color, if they are white, and really paying attention and saying 'ok, my goal for you is to have more self awareness.' I mean, my goal for all of my team members is to leave the year and be critical thinkers. It may be that they have to stop and look 'why am I responding this way' (initial interview 2012)?

As past Mission Year team members assert, this struggle is a life-long process. Shelly expressed issues in which she herself is struggling to overcome as an intentional neighbor. She explains, “What I'm fighting now is when I'm walking down the street, not thinking badly about a person, so it's almost the opposite. Social justice work in neighborhoods like ours, you can become very cynical and not trust anyone.”

Sarah as well admitted that,

I get frustrated with myself because the neighbors across the street, she's a single mom, she has three kids, and her 4 year old doesn't know her alphabet. So things like that still really frustrate me. I'm like 'I know you're a single mom and I know you are working but
that doesn't excuse you from things that need to happen.' That frustrates me because I think that I may still be putting the blame on the individual (initial interview 2012).

*Doing* requires an active struggle to remind oneself about the nature of assumptions and judgments.

Based on my engagement with the Mission Year materials and the participants, it is apparent that doing justice, or living out justice in this way moves beyond physical action. Justice, for the participants, is more than relocating, serving the community, living in simplicity or participating in political and institutional change – it is actively practicing a spirituality that keeps one's inner disposition humble and compassionate. This, according to the curriculum materials and the participants, must be achieved through time in solitude and prayer on a daily basis, to triumph over anger, greed, judgments, and self-righteous attitudes.

5.3 *Contemporary Relevance of Doing Justice*

According to Mission Year practitioners, doing justice is relocating, reconciling with the other through relationships in community. This type of community is designed to embrace and empower the poor, both economically and culturally, rather than displace them. The needs of intentional neighbors and incumbent neighbors alike are met through engagement in personal relationships. They advocate for one another civically and politically, exemplified by Shelley, who is currently single with no children and is fighting for the community schools to stay open. Furthermore, intentional neighbors are creating economic opportunities from hiring neighborhood kids for a summer camp to opening businesses such as a coffee shop or a gym. Every person I interviewed who is engaging in doing this action, including those who plan to in future, have decided to do so as a result of having completed a Mission Year program.

There is evidence that most Mission Year participants most likely adhered to liberal-based justice before participating in the program. First, five participants expressed having an individualistic view (blaming the individual) of poverty prior to joining Mission Year. Second, staff members
communicated that most new team members’ applications reveal an enthusiasm to show poor residents what they are lacking and what they need to succeed in life. Third, four participants expressed that they viewed justice as notions of equality by law. And finally, ten participants had no prior conception of social justice at all before entering the Mission Year program because, as many stated, their privilege ensured that they never had to think about it. I would argue that (1) the previously discussed shift in conceptions of injustice (established in chapter 5 as knowing) – moving from a position of denying the existence of racism to one where it is seen as embedded in the political and economic system, and moving from blaming the individual or never thinking about poverty to understanding the systemic failures that disadvantage non-white groups, and (2) the action of “living out justice” through relocating, reconciling, and redistributing (discussed in this chapter as doing), display that Mission Year participants have shifted toward more equity-based conceptions of justice.

Recall Harvey's (2009) argument that social processes are spatial and social justice is contingent upon social processes operating as a whole in society. Relocating and living out justice as an intentional neighbor is a social process that is very much spatial. Yet, it is not a social process that is operating as a whole in society – it is rather a social process contesting the social processes that are currently operating as a whole in society. Arguably, the way participants “live out justice” is a social process that is contests and disrupts the geographical flow of resources as practiced in the current economic structure. Young argues that the distributive paradigm cannot address injustice caused by oppression and domination. Yet, those who participate in the three R's are addressing recognition of group difference through reconciling relationships with 'the other' while investing their resources in a new distribution, thus simultaneously addressing both oppression and the distributive paradigm. The shift in the participants' concept relied heavily on the realization of the role of relationships in achieving a more just society. Relationships with marginalized groups can address oppression and domination. Both relocation and reconciling relationships possess the possibility of instigating more equal participation and democratic
voice for high-poverty urban residents in relationship with intentional neighbors, yet this was never mentioned explicitly by the participants. Practice of the three R's, however, does satisfy Fraser's (1995) concern that both the economic and cultural domains are approached in pursuing more just outcomes.
6 CONCLUSION

Founded on the three R philosophy – relocation, reconciliation, and redistribution – as theorized by John Perkins, the Mission Year program is designed to encourage participants to live out justice as intentional neighbors within the Christian community development movement. Toward that end, the program designers have crafted a curriculum, geared toward Christians, that, using biblical scripture as evidence, critiques American culture and the American church. The curriculum claims that individualism and racism are embedded in American society. It argues that individualism blames the poor for their circumstances while masking the advantages afforded to the privileged. The curriculum also charges that these beliefs have crept into the theology of the American church. As a result Christians, who are called by Jesus to care for the poor, have instead blamed poverty on the behavior of the poor.

The curriculum asserts that racism is embedded in the political and economic structures of American society. It further makes the case that (1) everyone who has benefited from the American economic system that was built on free land and free labor has a responsibility to become actively anti-racist and (2) Christians have a responsibility to become actively anti-racist because everyone is created in the image of God. The curriculum critiques isolationist suburbanization as facilitating both individualism and racism. Finally, the curriculum claims that consumerism encourages Christians to consume well past their needs.

Participants in the Mission Year program engage with the program materials while having relocated to a high-poverty neighborhood. The personal experiences of the neighborhood residents and the physical environment of the neighborhood around them have validated to participants the critique offered by the Mission Year curriculum about American culture and the American church. For the participants, this experience creates a new understanding of the causes of poverty, injustice and American culture that I have termed ‘justice as knowing.’ This understanding has culminated within participants a desire to “do justice” or “live out justice” as intentional neighbors by relocating to a high-
poverty neighborhood, reconciling racial relations through building relationships, and contributing to a redistribution of wealth by investing resources in a high-poverty neighborhood. This action I have termed to be 'justice as doing.' I have argued that, for participants of the Mission Year program, justice is knowing and justice is doing.

By conceptualizing justice as knowing and doing, where previously they have either had no conception of justice or universal conceptions of justice and equality and freedom under the law, I have argued that participants have experienced a shift in conception of justice from liberal-based justice theory, rooted in liberalism, to equity-based justice theories, most specifically notions of redistributive justice and justice as recognition of group difference.
REFERENCES


