

**THE THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE
OF SHARING MINISTRY WITH THOSE IN NEED**

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**THE THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE
OF SHARING MINISTRY WITH THOSE IN NEED**

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Churches and faith based organizations struggle with how to change the world and serve the needy in ways that are actually helpful for the people in need. Churches are called to help, and want to help, people who are hungry. Unfortunately, when churches fail to consider the long term impact of their food ministries the help may not be helpful or appropriate. While the instinct to give grows out of compassion, charity can demean, depress, and oppress people with needs. It often fails to see those in need as neighbors, as people with abilities, gifts, and knowledge. One possible response to the faults of direct service charity is to work instead to change the systems that create poverty. And yet, as work is done to change the systems that create poverty in the United States, people need food in the meantime. This project explores how churches can address some of the challenges of direct service by engaging in what I shall refer to as shared ministry, a concept I developed at Worcester Fellowship.

In 2007, I worked with a partner to start a new church: Worcester Fellowship, an outdoor church of adults without homes, or at risk of losing their housing. This ministry centered on a weekly Sunday lunch and worship outdoors in Worcester, Massachusetts. In 2011, I was at a conference exploring effective ministry in urban churches. At the closing activity, each participant was asked to name something to do to expand his or her church's outreach to people in need. Although Worcester Fellowship's congregational leadership team was primarily people who had no housing and others at risk of losing their housing, the church did not engage in any outward mission. People who had enough food came and "did mission to" the members of Worcester Fellowship by bringing and serving lunch, donating gift cards, and visiting the

ministry; members of Worcester Fellowship received the food. I committed at that conference to turn the Sunday meal into a ministry done *with* the members of Worcester Fellowship. It took time, and the process hit many snags, but I began to realize that Worcester Fellowship was changing from a lunch program that had worship to a church engaged in the ministry of lunch. Indoor churches continued to bring lunch, but outdoor and indoor people worked together to serve the meal. For the people who brought food, and the people who were food insecure, the shared serving created a sense of community, and that sense of community made Worcester Fellowship into a church. After I left Worcester Fellowship to work for an indoor church, I began to wonder if indoor church could do the same thing that Worcester Fellowship had done. What if food ministries offered by churches with buildings were *shared ministries*, shared between people who have food security and people who do not? What does shared ministry look like in an indoor context?

This project explores the idea that direct service food ministry should be shared ministry: that the people who are food insecure and the people who have enough food should eat together, and work together, to distribute food accordingly. Church-based food ministry is called to provide food for people who need it, but is also called to address the problems created by direct service ministries. To do that it must create community by breaking down the boundaries that divide us. This project argues that shared ministry can help to overcome stereotypes of people living with poverty, can lead to appreciating people who are food insecure as neighbors, and can create a community of belonging to one another. In addition, this project will describe four sites that are using shared ministry.

The problems with direct service charity are laid out in Chapter Two, but the implication of much of the recent literature on this suggests that church-based direct service charity should be replaced with community development work. While community development and community

organizing are necessary parts of working towards God's reign on earth; this project argues that it is premature to end direct service ministry. Rather than ending direct service ministry, I propose that churches engage in shared ministry as a strategy to meet people's immediate needs while building relationships. Those relationships can be further developed to engage in effective community development or community organizing. Shared ministry builds the foundation needed for people with enough food and people without enough food to learn about the systemic causes of poverty and to build solidarity with one another.

I am writing from my perspective as a pastor of a progressive, majority white, indoor church in an affluent suburb, working with people who want to do what is best for the people they serve. While I have seven years experience as a pastor to people who live on the streets, in shelters, and at the edges of food security, I am not food insecure. My writing will necessarily be influenced by my identity as a middle-class white woman, ordained with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), living in an almost all white rural community, in a home I own, with more than enough food to eat.

Definition of Terms

There are many ways to define poverty in the United States. For this project I deal only with the question whether the participants in food ministry are *food secure* or *food insecure*. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines food insecurity as a measure of an individual or household's access to "enough food for healthy, active living."¹ In periodic surveys the USDA asks representative samples households ten questions about how often they need to cut back portion sizes or reduce the food they eat because they do not have the money to access

¹Alisha Coleman-Jensen, Matthew P. Rabbitt, Christian A. Gregory, and Anita Singh. *Household Food Security in the United States in 2015*. ERR-2015 U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, September 2016, 2, accessed October 5, 2016. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/2137663/err215.pdf>.

it, and eight additional questions about whether their children sometimes do not have enough food.² Those who answer affirmatively about at least three of the indicators are identified as “food insecure”; those who have six or more indicators are identified as having “very low food security”.³ In early studies the language was food insecure or food insecure with hunger.

Direct service charities are programs that give resources or services directly to the individual or household in need. For this project, I will only be talking about giving food, and will only be engaged with churches that give food through *food pantries* (which some research calls groceries), *meals programs* (sometimes called kitchens), and *gardens*. There are other ways that individuals may receive food support, namely government subsidies such as the USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP),⁴ plus child specific programs such as Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program,⁵ and a variety of government funded school meals programs.⁶ *Food Banks*, privately run organizations that obtain, store, and distribute food for pantries and meals programs⁷ show up in the volunteer work during my site visits. The USDA refers to food banks, food pantries, and meals programs as Emergency Food Assistance

² Coleman-Jensen, *Household Food Security*, 3.

³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴ “Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)”, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service, accessed October 7, 2016. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>.

⁵ “Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)”, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service, accessed October 7, 2016. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/women-infants-and-children-wic>.

⁶ “Child Nutrition Programs”, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service, accessed October 7, 2016. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/child-nutrition-programs>.

⁷ Doug O’Brien, Erin Staley, Stephanie Uchima, Eleanor Thompson, and Halley Torres Aldeen. *The Charitable Food Assistance System: The Sector’s Role in Ending Hunger in America*. The UPS Foundation and the Congressional Hunger Center 2004 Hunger Forum Discussion paper. America’s Second Harvest: Ending Hunger, 4, accessed October 5, 2016. <http://www.hungercenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/The-Charitable-Food-Assistance-System-Americas-Second-Harvest.pdf>.

System (EFAS) and some receive federal funding.⁸ Feeding America,⁹ the private network that works with food banks and the programs that get food from those food banks, reports that in 2014 there were 58,000 pantries and meal programs in their network; 62% of those are faith-based.¹⁰ This reinforces the importance of faith based food providers. In my experience there are many additional meals programs that are not affiliated with (and sometimes not aware of) the resources of food banks.

I use the term *shared ministry* to describe sharing the work of direct service ministry. For this project, I am only looking at church-based food ministries. Shared ministry in this context is people with and without food security sharing the work, and the food benefits, of the program. That is, people who want to donate food will join in the eating, and people who are food insecure will join in the distributing of food. Here, my criteria is only that people will voluntarily work together (as happened at Worcester Fellowship and the sites I observed), but shared ministry could also include planning, carrying out, and evaluating a church-based food ministry, or it might be simply about sharing tasks like set-up, serving, and cleanup.

Is Food Security a Problem in the United States?

In 2015 the official rate of food insecure households was 12.7 percent in the U.S. (totaling 15.8 million households); five percent (6.3 million households) were very food

⁸ Ronette Briefel, Jonathan Jacobson, Nancy Clusen, Teresa Zavitsky, Miki Satake, Brittany Dawson, and Rhoda Cohen. *The Emergency Food Assistance System—Findings From the Client Survey Final Report*. E-FAN-03-007 by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service July 2003, 1, accessed October 5, 2016. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/1805896/efan03007.pdf>

⁹ Feeding America was called America's Second Harvest until they changed their name in September 2008.

¹⁰ Christine Borger, Amaris Kinne, Meghan O'Leary, Sheila Zedlewski, Emily Engelhard, Jill Montaquila, Elaine Waxman, Theresa DelVecchio Dys, Gregory Mills, David Watsula, Monica Hake, Brittany Morgan, Nancy Weinfeld. *Hunger in America 2014: Executive Summary*, Feeding America. August 2014, 2, accessed October 5, 2016. <http://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/our-research/hunger-in-america/hia-2014-executive-summary.pdf>.

insecure.¹¹ The percentages are higher for households with children, those headed by a single parent, and those that are African American or Hispanic.¹² Figures vary widely by state, from a low of 8.5 percent food insecure of North Dakotan households to the highest rate in Mississippi where 20.8 percent are food insecure.¹³ The numbers fluctuate but have not recently dropped as low as the 10.1 percent food insecurity rate in 1999.¹⁴ Food accessibility continues to be a significant challenge in the United States.

Not every person who receives food at pantries or meals programs are defined as food insecure by the USDA. In Feeding America's 2014 study of people who used their pantries and meal programs 84% were food insecure and only 55% were receiving SNAP benefits, although it appeared many of those not receiving SNAP were qualified for the program.¹⁵ While the goal of these programs is addressing food insecurity they often also reach people who are disabled, elderly, and people in the midst of natural disasters as well.¹⁶ However, most who use food programs are not experiencing a short-term need: "63 percent of households plan to acquire food at meal or grocery programs on a regular basis to help with their monthly food budget."¹⁷ In 2003 the USDA published a study by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. that found the average household income of food pantry users was \$10,766 per year,¹⁸ and about 8% did not have

¹¹ Coleman-Jensen, *Household Food Security*, 6.

¹² *Ibid.*, 13.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁵ Borger et al, *Hunger in America*, 16.

¹⁶ Briefel et al, *Emergency Food Assistance System*, 3.

¹⁷ Borger et al, *Hunger in America*, 18.

¹⁸ Briefel et al, *Emergency Food Assistance System*, 38.

housing.¹⁹ For meals programs the income was lower (\$9907/year²⁰) and 36% did not have housing.²¹ Sometimes food pantries or meals will limit who can receive, or how often, and 30% of clients reported that they needed food from a meals program but could not get it.²² Pantries and food ministries provide long term food assistance both to expand what people are getting from government food supplemental programs, and for people who are either not seeking, or not eligible for, government aid.²³ SNAP and other programs are supporting people who do not have sufficient access to food, but even with those programs there is significant food insecurity in the United States, and direct service food ministries are stepping up to meet that need.

Outline of Project

This project proposes that direct service charity is a useful tool to provide food to people who need it, but when direct service becomes shared ministry it can also create a sense of community and belonging both for those who are food insecure and for those who have enough food. There are two parts, Part One encompasses Chapters One through Four, and makes the argument for what are the theoretical traits of shared ministry. Part Two, which is Chapters Five through Seven, describes existing shared ministries.

Part One begins with Chapter Two, identifying a number of the problems with direct service food ministries. Limiting who can volunteer to those who have enough food perpetuates stereotypes of people who are poor and food insecure and makes food insecurity appear to be an

¹⁹ Briefel et al, *Emergency Food Assistance System*, 40.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 87.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 78.

²² *Ibid.*, 95.

²³ *Ibid.*, 123.

individual rather than a systemic problem. While program leaders may limit who can volunteer for pragmatic reasons, for example to make the programs more efficient or less chaotic, the “us and them” consequences are unfortunate. Food secure volunteers begin to see themselves as more than those who are food insecure, and these stereotypes lead to oppression. Systemic oppression based on race, gender, and class works to keep people fearful of one another, which further perpetuates stereotypes. Churches have contributed to the way US society uses language that attributes poverty to sinfulness; this “sin language” builds up fear and separation, which keeps the givers and receivers in food ministries away from each another. Church-based programs often treat those who come to food ministries as clients or guests, rather than as neighbors who are part of a shared community of belonging.

Chapter Three considers what Matthew 25:31-46, the story of the sheep and the goats, and Acts 6:1-7, the story of the Hellenistic widows, contribute to the idea of shared food ministries. In an effort to read and understand scripture *with* people who are dealing with food insecurity, I use a cultural studies approach to influence my historical-theological perspective. The Matthew text requires thinking about what it means serve food to people who need it knowing the Matthean Jesus says that giving food to a person who is hungry is giving food to Christ. If those serving food see the people who need food as Christ, they will see them as individuals who have gifts and skills to offer, and as someone important to know. In addition, I argue that the food insecure people are included in the judgment scene, not only as people who can be served, but also as people who will be judged based on their willingness to serve others. This story insists that everyone must provide food (and other material resources) to those who need it, regardless of their own food security. Thus the story of the sheep and the goats points to food ministries where people eat and work together, so that each person can more fully know each other and more fully serve each other. Acts 6:1-6 points to the role food, and serving food,

plays in the creating shared community in the early church. When the Hellenistic widows are left out of the early church's meals program, questions of cultural differences and sharing resources arise. The women were left out of their turn to serve others, rather than out of their turn to receive charity, and this text is a call for modern meals programs to model the commensality of the early church by putting cultural minorities in charge and giving everyone a turn to serve.

Chapter Four uses the works of Gustavo Gutiérrez and Letty Russell to engage in a liberation theology critique of direct service ministry and to identify how shared ministry can improve direct service. For both Gutiérrez and Russell, solidarity is a necessary component to changing the systems that create poverty. In this project, I explore solidarity developed between people without enough food and those with enough food. For Gutiérrez, solidarity is dependent on *conscientization*, on learning about the systems that create poverty and the role that those with enough material resources play in perpetuating that system, and to be conscientized people must be in relationship with each other. In contrast to the arguments presented in Chapter Two, Gutiérrez says that dependence is created by systemized inequality that benefits people with enough resources, not by programs that meet the needs of people with few material resources. Eating together expands people's ability to see interdependence, to see that those with enough resources need relationships with people with few resources as much as the people with few resources need the food that is served. By working together as volunteers in shared ministry people can know each other as co-workers for change. Letty Russell's round table theology argues that it is not lack of skills that keeps the leadership table small, but rather the stereotypes that grow out of oppression that limits the criteria for leadership. Realizing that people who need resources have skills and leadership to contribute to a food program leads to the discovery that there have always been skilled leaders among the people who are food insecure. Shared ministry provides a foundation for widening the table of leadership, but it will not lead to conscientization

and solidarity unless those involved also tackle the systems that limits food access. My hypothesis is that shared food ministry will connect people to others they might never have known because they will have the opportunity to cross class boundaries, and that shared ministry will create opportunities for relationship building, for building up new leaders, and for developing solidarity. Potentially, shared ministry can contribute to resistance against classism and social action to address the systemic causes of food insecurity. A conclusion to Part One gathers the problems of Chapter Two with the information from Chapters Three and Four to develop a theoretical basis for shared ministry.

Part Two begins with Chapter Five which lays out my methods for observing shared ministry in action, and Chapter Six reports on what I was and was not able to observe as I visited four sites that use shared ministry. Using participant observation, interviews of a key informant and volunteers, and a questionnaire, this project describes the relationships built at church-based shared food ministry programs. I found a strong sense of belonging to the ministry and in some cases to the church, and volunteers with and without food security who felt ownership of the ministry. I found volunteers who were food insecure that contributed significant skills to the food programs. In the end, I was not able to determine how much of the relationship building crossed the lines of class, and except at one site I did not see participants using their sense of belonging to build solidarity for social action. Shared ministry wasted food resources, required many volunteers, and was generally chaotic, but food was distributed to people who needed it, and it appeared to create a sense of interdependence and community. Chapter Seven concludes this project report with a revised picture of how shared ministry can be practically carried out. There is room for more study of how to engage in shared ministry, of how shared ministry is different from other direct service ministry, and of whether shared ministry can lead to conscientization and solidarity and thus change of the systemic causes of poverty and food insecurity.

CHAPTER TWO: THE PROBLEMS OF DIRECT SERVICE CHARITY

As shown in Chapter One, food insecurity is a significant problem in the United States and church-based direct service ministries are a significant help by providing gardens, meal programs, and food pantries that meet people's immediate needs. Many authors in the field of Christian missions argue that direct service charity is more harmful than helpful. This chapter explores those arguments and evaluates whether the concerns can be addressed with shared ministry. Several of the authors believe direct service charity to be so harmful that they propose ending it, replacing it with community development or community organizing. Others argue that direct service needs to be more relational or that it needs to be limited to short term situations. While churches can, and should, engage in systems change this project argues that direct service charity is necessary. While some critiques are valid, many of those problems can be overcome by converting to shared ministry. In this chapter I will identify the primary problems with the model of direct service food ministry, for instance: that it starts with those who give rather than those who need, that it perpetuates individualism and stereotypes, that it blocks relationship building and evangelism, that it fails to recognize the gifts that food-insecure people could contribute to the ministry, and that it grows out of isolation, fear, and oppression, especially classism.

Starting with the Givers, not the Receivers

One problem raised by a couple of authors is that direct service charities start with the resources the givers have available, rather than starting with resources, or needs, of the people who need material resources. Often a group of Christians that have enough material resources

think about themselves, what *they* have and what *they* can do, rather than focus on the people who are food insecure. That is not their intention; the programs often start with a mission mindset, a visible need for material resources, and interest in responding to Jesus's command in Matthew 25:31-46 to feed "the least of these." Yet the first questions are self-focused: what can *we* do, what are *our* skills, what do *we* have to give? Those creating such ministries ask themselves how to develop a program that uses the food secure volunteers they know, takes advantage of the food or financial resources available, and serves the most people with those resources. Funders and supporting congregations encourage the ministries to focus on efficiency and order, and to prioritize limiting waste. The result is direct service ministry where people with enough resources feel good about themselves, but the stereotypes of people who are food insecure are encouraged and perpetuated.

Laura Stivers, in *Disrupting Homelessness*, takes a progressive Christian stance in her study of several homeless direct service charities and how they help, and hurt, the people they serve. She found that the emphasis was on changing the people who did not have homes. These individuals were seen as irresponsible; thus, the goal of the charities was to teach what Stivers identifies as middle-class U.S. values such as discipline and work,¹ cleanliness,² independence rather than dependence,³ and the ability to follow rules.⁴ In Stivers' study the ministries presume that if people with few material resources were more like middle class, food secure, people, they

¹ Laura Stivers, *Disrupting Homelessness: Alternative Christian Approaches*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011, Kindle, 85.

² *Ibid.*, 80.

³ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 83.

would not be poor⁵. Stivers argues that direct service charity should not be focused on fixing people, and that middle class values are not a solution for poverty.

The focus on middle class values leads to systems that check for “appropriate” behaviors. In Robert Lupton’s book *Toxic Charity* he describes that process as gatekeeping: a person needs an ID or can only pick up food once a month, needs to be sober or properly dressed, or needs to not have weapons or too many piles of things. He has found that gatekeepers tend to be compassionate and may respond by trying to help individuals they have gotten to know, but that leadership will often shut such help down to avoid accusations of favoritism or concerns about equality.⁶ The emphasis on a particular definition of “fairness,” defined by leadership that prioritizes middle class values, interferes with the reciprocity necessary to create mutual relationships. Both the servers and the served are anxious to know which rules must be followed. Gatekeeping is meant to provide order, but its side affect is separation. For shared ministry to improve on direct service it must start with the concerns of those who are food insecure.

Sustaining Separation from Others

Another challenge of direct service ministry is that it sustains people’s existing separation based on class. Christopher Heuertz and Christine Pohl propose reforming direct service by reducing the separation of the servers and from the served in their book *Friendship at the Margins*. Their story is a critique of traditional forms of evangelism and takes place overseas, but is relevant to direct service food ministries in the United States because of their focus on getting to know people before and while providing resources for them. They note that the traditional

⁵ Stivers, *Disrupting Homelessness*, 51.

⁶ Robert Lupton, *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charity Hurt Those They Help (And How to Reverse It)*, New York: HarperOne, 2011, Kindle, 52.

model of giving away material goods often ends up with “a multitude of rules that tend to exclude troublesome people.”⁷ The goal of the rules is order, fairness, and equity, but the impact is exclusion, not relationship. Rules limit the ability to connect with others.

Beyond the challenge of order and fairness, relationships are harder to build when one person has more material resources than another. Heuertz and Pohl discovered in their evangelism effort that “friendship and possessions are awkwardly related.”⁸ Questions of whether and when someone should share their material resources with another person are especially hard, but so are simpler questions like how a person might share about their vacation, their home, or their job with someone else who does not have the same opportunities for vacation, home, or work. Similarly, they note, building close connections to food insecure people is hard because listening to difficult stories can be discomfoting and frustrating for food secure people; it takes away any preconceived certainty that they know the solutions to poverty.⁹ People engaged ministries that build relationships across boundaries of class find themselves struggling with the fact that systemic inequities are not easily fixed. Although beginning to recognize systems of inequality is important, Heuertz and Pohl are right that learning to see, and deal with, systemic issues at the same time a person is experimenting with relationship building is hard. It can also expose that what a person identified as “enough” material resources may in fact be excess.¹⁰ Hearing about systems that exploit people without material resources may lead to uncomfortable realizations that those systems are supported by the listener’s privilege. I

⁷ Christopher Heuertz and Christine D. Pohl, *Friendship at the Margins: Discovering Mutuality in Service and Mission*, Resources for Reconciliation, Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2010, Kindle, 100.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 128.

remember sitting at a soup kitchen with a man who worked, but did not get paid, at a construction job in the neighboring town and suddenly realizing that the work he did not get paid for may have been building a home in my neighborhood. Conversations with people who have been hurt by our economic systems make it obvious that for people with material resources that those resources come at a cost beyond what meets the eye.

Heuertz and Pohl suggest that creating friendships between those who have resources to give away and those who have few material resources requires vulnerability and sharing of themselves, not just their resources, and may require people with resources to acknowledge the privilege that comes with those resources.¹¹ For this reason, direct service charities providers often find it is “easier to keep people who are poor at a distance—or to arrange to enter their world only through brief visits.”¹² The difficulties of another person’s life can be overwhelming,¹³ and the complicated, ambiguous challenges of poverty may challenge a previously held worldview,¹⁴ such as the idea that people with material resources know what people without resources need to do differently. Friendship requires being learners and listeners¹⁵ rather than only teachers or providers. It requires being non-judgmental when a friend does not take advice, or disappears, or returns to a situation that is bad for them.¹⁶

Heuertz and Pohl note that relationship building, and becoming a steady, reliable

¹¹ Heuertz and Pohl, *Friendship at the Margins*, 84.

¹² *Ibid.*, 85.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 101.

presence, takes vulnerability and significantly: “the work is slow, small, and often undramatic.”¹⁷ This very real work is hard to describe to funders who want stories about people in need and concrete, measurable changes to people’s lives. The authors insist that “[o]ur friends are not projects or personal embodiments of a cause, but partners in community”¹⁸ which cannot be summarized in a fundraising appeal. Similarly Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert in *When Helping Hurts* asks us to “[i]magine going to a donor and asking for funds to transform a city through ‘hanging out’”.¹⁹ Their book is an evangelical, mission-oriented perspective on direct service charity; they argue relationship building and community development should replace direct service charity for long-term problems. They note that building relationships takes time and often funders, and churches, want quick solutions. In contrast they describe how Sandtown Habitat for Humanity took four years to build relationships and develop community leaders before completing its first house.²⁰ Funders want a product, or even many products, when what is needed is a process.²¹ Using the term “McDevelopment” Corbett and Fikkert argue that direct service charity requires prioritizing efficiency, expandability, and transferability from one location to the next;²² that its highest value is reaching the most people for the least money.²³ But efficiency “imposes solutions on poor communities that are inconsistent with local culture, that are not embraced and ‘owned’ by the community members, or that cannot work in that particular

¹⁷ Heuertz and Pohl, *Friendship at the Margins*, 28.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁹ Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor*, Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2012, 85.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 84.

²² *Ibid.*, 142.

²³ *Ibid.*, 151.

setting.”²⁴ They note that some cultures see time as linear, while other cultures see time as “polychronic”—a view that identifies time as slower, and timelines as less important than relationship building.²⁵ Polychronic time allows for people to become part of each other’s lives, but not for highly efficient ministries to simply hand out resources. Lupton notes that our present system “generates compelling stories and statistics, gives regular feedback to church members, has controls for hoarding and fraud, and maintains good books.”²⁶ More relational ministries require more volunteers, and more time, and may deliver less food. Relationships are not efficient; relationships are messy; relationships take time. For shared ministry to improve on direct service ministry the focus must be on relationship building rather than on efficiency, thus reducing the separation of food secure people from those who are food insecure

Perpetuating Stereotypes

Direct service charity is one of many things that perpetuate the stereotypes of people who live in poverty as lazy, irresponsible, as other, and even as needing to be “cured” of something that people with enough material resources might “catch” if they get too close. At the same time, the direct service charity model supports the stereotype of the people who give food as responsible, able, and superior. These parallel stereotypes build on each other and discourage relationship building and sharing good news with each other. Stereotyping grows out of the idea that poverty is an individual, rather than a systemic problem.

Supporting Stereotypes of Receivers as “Less Than”

Direct service charities deals with individuals, rather than with systems and identifies

²⁴ Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 142.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 168.

²⁶ Lupton, *Toxic Charity*, 55.

those who receive food as less than those who can give food away. Corbett and Fikkert note “[t]he vast majority of the economic, social, religious, and political systems in which a particular individual lives are not created or even influenced by that individual.”²⁷ They argue that because poverty is systemic, responding to individual needs hides the systemic problems. Therefore, we should not respond with individual responses, except in situations that they call “relief:” where the need is urgent, and the service or resource is provided for a very short period of time.²⁸ Appropriate relief would be first response to a natural disaster, or assistance in finding safe shelter for a battered woman, but not ongoing meal programs or food pantries. Because food ministries feed the same people week after week, Corbett and Fikkert argue for providing support to fix the individuals (rehabilitation) and engaging in community redevelopment,²⁹ other programs harm the individuals receiving food.³⁰

Corbett and Fikkert tell a story of a young woman knocking on doors asking for food; when offered help to find a long-term solution she turns it down. They suggest the Christian response is to refuse to give her food, and offer ways to improve her own life, that is, to offer rehabilitation³¹. For them it is less harmful to her to refuse food than to provide it. While their goal is to encourage Christians to create community development programs that make food more accessible, in this story, however, they do not point out the systems keeping the woman from food. Instead, they presume it is direct service charity that is keeping her from getting her own food. As evangelical authors, it is interesting that they also do not point out the call to give food

²⁷ Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 90.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 109.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 104.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 111.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 107.

as expressed in Matthew 25:31-46. Despite their argument that *both* individuals and systems must be changed, in this story they ignore both the systemic causes of hunger, and the reality that people need food every day, not in an unknown future. Shared ministry acknowledges the immediacy of the need for food, and the slowness of systemic change. Corbett and Fikkert note that more conservative Christians tend to emphasize the brokenness of individuals, while more liberal Christians emphasize brokenness of systems, and that Christian ministries should look for Jesus' redemptive power to heal both systemic and individual poverty.³² Their premise is right but I long for their stories to engage the complexity of the two together.

Often a focus on redemption of individuals leads to a focus on individual sinfulness. Corbett and Fikkert argue that such a focus is a dangerous direction for people of faith to go. "Our basic predisposition toward poor communities—including their people, organizations, institutions, and culture—should include the notion that they are part of the good world that Christ created and is sustaining."³³ Corbett and Fikkert argue that direct service charity identifies people who need material resources as problem people, rather than as part of God's good creation. This makes our helping of people hurt those same people because it perpetuates, rather than solves, the real problem at hand. Most direct service charity is set up with the presumption that people who need things do not have skills or gifts, they only have needs and weaknesses; they are only people who are broken. Because volunteers at food ministries do not know the people served (and sometimes even if they *do* know the people) they begin to presume that hunger grows out of something more dangerous than simple material poverty. A common perception is that food insecure people are irresponsible, without gifts or strengths, unwilling to

³² Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 49.

³³ *Ibid.*, 60.

work, mentally ill, addicted, criminals; people secure volunteers begin to see the problem is with the people who do not have enough, not with the system that does not allow for enough for everyone. People are blamed for their poverty. People who come to get the food they need start blaming themselves for their poverty.

Domestic direct service charity is similar to many short-term international mission trips. Lupton shares a village leader's lament: the local community's dignity erodes when foreign mission trips arrive; they feel the need to respond to wealthy missionaries with appropriate neediness in order to qualify for charity.³⁴ Lupton argues the Christian commitment to service leads people with material resources to look for problems, specifically, problems they know how to fix. "Service seeks a need, a problem to fix, an object to pity. But pity diminishes" the people being served.³⁵ Lupton notes that people providing charity are (usually) not *intending* to pity, nor intending to diminish those served. He argues, however, that not knowing those being served, and starting with the servers gifts rather than receivers needs, direct service ministries *do* diminish those they serve. Like Corbett and Fikkert, he is especially concerned that churches not provide short-term solutions to long-term problems. Lupton argues that "[f]ood in our society is a chronic poverty need, not a life threatening one,"³⁶ apparently unaware that it is meal programs and food pantries that make it so that food insecurity is not life threatening in many communities. For Lupton, responding to chronic needs as if it were a crisis causes "dependency, deception, [and] disempowerment"³⁷ on the part of the people in need, and encourages people who give food to see people who are food insecure as less than themselves.

³⁴ Lupton, *Toxic Charity*, 21.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 90.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

Stivers notes that even when givers get to know the people in need, they may continue to judge individuals. She found that staff working with individuals that do not have housing tend to interpret individual stories in ways that hide how systemic racism and sexism create poverty.³⁸ This happens because the stereotypes of people living in poverty are so entrenched in our society. In her critiques of several homeless ministries she demonstrates the ministries' demonization of specific behaviors and how that turns into stereotypes that demonize all people who live with poverty. She argues that homelessness is conflated with chronic homelessness.³⁹ Similarly, people who do not have enough food are often conflated with people who are homeless. Stivers notices the U.S.'s view of home ownership as a mark of responsibility; not having a home then becomes a sign of irresponsibility.⁴⁰ Further, not having enough food becomes a sign of not knowing how to budget for food, shop for food, or how to cook food, and these signal general unreliability and incompetence.⁴¹ People who need homes and food are seen as unable to provide for themselves because they are perceived as unreliable and flawed, rather than people in poverty with limited choices. Since they make poor choices, people who have material resources are encouraged to help people without resources in developing new skills, such as job skills, social skills, skills for healthier decision making, without any evaluation as to whether individuals actually lack any of those skills. Stivers suggests that even when we know people, direct service charity reinforces their identity as "diseased other," and as someone wholly unlike me, people still unconsciously create "a moral boundary between who is respectable/clean

³⁸ Stivers, *Disrupting Homelessness*, 84.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

. . . or diseased/dirty.”⁴² The wide boundary between people with and without resources is made even wider by this covert stereotype.

Stivers suggests that the stereotype of “diseased” encourages people with enough to look for individual cures in the form of middle class language, values, and practices.⁴³ The presumption is that if people who need material resources were more like people who have resources, they would not have gotten into this predicament. Stivers fails to mention that this presumption also protects people with enough from imagining that they might ever face food insecurity or homelessness themselves. In both ministries Stivers studied, the goal was “transforming” the individuals and families who take part. As long as people in need must be transformed, the programs are presuming the participants are not good enough at the start.⁴⁴ Stivers would like to see society, systems, and supports transformed, rather than focusing on transforming the individuals who struggle to deal with systemic obstacles. By focusing on transformation of a deviant individual, there is a danger of converting more compassionate stereotypes of people in poverty into unfair judgments. Stivers notes that seeing the people in poverty as victims of trauma, as suffering from mental illness, as victims of assault, and/or as abused, helps us to respond with compassion and helpful services⁴⁵ and yet still presumes that the role of shelters, food programs, and social services is to treat the individuals for their wounds rather than change systems to prevent wounds, or preventing wounds from leading to poverty.⁴⁶ There are many survivors of trauma, people living with mental illness, and people living with

⁴² Stivers, *Disrupting Homelessness*, 51.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

addictions, who are not homeless or short of food resources. the difference between them is only their access to money. In the programs Stivers studied, the victim language led to seeing people without homes as people who do not have agency in their lives.⁴⁷

Direct service ministries are a problem when we see people only as victims, only as people who make bad decisions, only as people who have needs. Interestingly, Stivers found that even in programs where the staff and volunteers became acquainted with the participants in some depth, the world-view that the impoverished people are the problem is hard to break. For example, at one of the programs Stivers studied, the guests named low paying jobs and the inability to access affordable housing as key to their poverty, while the staff listed dysfunctional behavior of people who are homeless and the shortage of shelters.⁴⁸ When working for programs that presume that the person in need must be changed, rather than in programs that address the faults of the system, people are inclined to hear that the program is providing exactly what is needed. “People who have experienced poverty and/or homelessness know what the structural obstacles are,”⁴⁹ Stivers says, and yet providers do not believe them. People in need have a voice, have knowledge, have contributions to make to end homelessness or food insecurity.

And yet even engaging people in need in the work of the ministry can be done in a way, to use Lupton’s word, toxic. In both of the ministries Stivers studied, the people in need helped with the work. In one program after participants were transformed “appropriately” (in faith and independence from the program), they came back as volunteers. In other contexts, she argues the work is required as payment for the resources provided. Thus, the work requirement is

⁴⁷ Stivers, *Disrupting Homelessness*, 55.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

implemented so that this is not a handout that will increase dependence, although Stivers notes that there are no work requirements, or concerns about dependence,⁵⁰ for handout programs like the mortgage interest tax credit.⁵¹

Stereotypes of people who are poor are entrenched and difficult to avoid. Stivers's point is important: despite getting to know people, direct service ministries can maintain and support stereotypes. Her study does not, however, need to be seen as the necessary result of any church-based direct service ministry. What is right is that any ministry, direct service or otherwise, must recognize these stereotypes and actively work to refute them. To refute this, shared ministry must work with volunteers to develop the skills of recognizing stereotypes that are so insidious that people in poverty may believe them about themselves. Shared ministry recognizes that people deserve to have enough food (housing, clothing, and medical care) simply because we are all children of God. Direct service programs that propose a test of "worthiness" are programs that will perpetuate stereotypes, and that will hide the systemic barriers to getting out of poverty. Shared ministry must develop in ways that prevent perpetuating stereotypes.

Supporting the Stereotype of Givers as Closer to God

Another concern about direct service charity is that it stereotypes people who provide resources as better than, or more able to follow God's will than, people who need the resources. It is easier to simply give food away than to build relationships and create community. It also feels good to be the person who can give things away. Lupton suggests one of the primary goals of direct service charity is for people with enough material resources to feel good about

⁵⁰ I will address questions of dependence more fully in Chapter Four.

⁵¹ Stivers, *Disrupting Homelessness*, 115.

themselves.⁵² He asks, if it is more important to build up the giver's own self-worth, rather than to figure out what is best for the people in need, is the goal actually charity? Certainly, it is easier to feel good about oneself as giver if the stereotypes of the people in need (that they are broken, irresponsible people, very different from the givers) are true. Stereotypes help givers to feel good about themselves. To build relationships across the boundary of access to material resources requires people who have material resources to admit that they do not know everything there is to know about the people they serve, and that impairs the ability to feel good about themselves.

Heuertz and Pohl notice that direct service ministries give volunteers with food security a sense of power and control.⁵³ To keep that sense of power and control, and to keep feeling good, it is helpful for givers to remain distanced from the complexities of food insecurity, from the ways addictions, abuse, and systemic barriers keep people in poverty, and to be assured that it is one's own hard work that has ensured food security. The sense that someone's health and wealth grows out of their spiritual strength, that God is rewarding them for their faithfulness, is the prosperity gospel. Connected is the idea that people who are poor or are not healthy must be spiritually weak, since clearly God is not rewarding them in the same way. Corbett and Fikkert are clear that "[t]his is none other than the lie of the health and wealth gospel: spiritual maturity leads to financial prosperity."⁵⁴ Shared ministry based on relationships risks revealing that hard work, faith, and material wealth are not connected to each other.

When direct service charity begins with people who have sufficient material resources as the only leadership and volunteers, it does not build the relationships needed to prioritize the

⁵² Lupton, *Toxic Charity*, 57.

⁵³ Heuertz and Pohl, *Friendship at the Margins*, 96.

⁵⁴ Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 70.

needs of people who use the ministry. The presumption that only people with material resources have the right ideas, right faith, and right skills to engage a direct service ministry keeps the programs focused on efficiency and order, on serving the most people, and on limiting waste, which results in rules and policies that require participants to adopt middle class values. The risk is that the separation of people into givers and receivers also implies that the givers have a special relationship with God, and special abilities that those who are food insecure do not have. While it is more comfortable to avoid relationships that may point out the awkwardness of our identity as Christians with more material resources than those we serve, and it may feel good to be able to be in the position of giving, this creates charity that is as harmful as it is helpful. Shared ministry must start with the needs of those without material resources, it must find ways to cross boundaries that keep people segregated and it must be relational.

Direct service charity does not only perpetuate stereotypes of people in need, it (according to Lupton) also critiques the way direct service ministry reinforces the giver's belief that their service makes them superior in God's eyes. The implication is that the "others" are only receivers, and thus cannot be true disciples, true servants. Lupton insists almsgiving "affirms the superiority of the giver, who thus gains a point on the recipient, binds him [*sic*], demands gratitude, humiliates him and reduces him to a lower state than he had before."⁵⁵ Although he emphasizes the sense of superiority may be accidental, and recognizes that people give out of a desire to share and to love, it makes direct service charity patronizing and, indeed, toxic.⁵⁶ Lupton's point is that the sense of superiority hurts people in need; it is toxic to those who receive charity.

⁵⁵ Lupton, *Toxic Charity*, 34.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

Corbett and Fikkert expand on this by identifying how a sense of superiority is also toxic to those who have material resources and that the sense of superiority is part of human sinfulness. Direct service efforts start with good intent: the simple supposition that having extra material resources means a person should give from their excess to people who need material resources. It is easy to believe one's excess is the solution to another's poverty.⁵⁷ Corbett and Fikkert describe the sin of materialism in people who have an excess of material resources.⁵⁸ By identifying giving of excess as a virtue, rather than recognizing how materialism separates people from God, such virtue encourages excess. Donations become a way to justify materialism. When a person with excess material resources identifies their own sin as a blessing, it hides equality before God and hurts the people with material resources.

For Corbett and Fikkert the most dangerous aspect of faith based direct service charity is that it reinforces both the "god-complex" of the economically rich while it builds on the feelings of inferiority and shame of the economically poor.⁵⁹ Adopted from Jayakumar Christian's 1994 Ph.D. thesis *Powerlessness of the Poor*⁶⁰ Corbett and Fikkert use the idea of god-complex for the way people with material resources stereotype themselves as especially able to help others, and as especially okay with God. The god-complex includes the idea that givers are a little *like* God in their ability to care for others.⁶¹ Helping hurts people with plenty because it keeps them from

⁵⁷ Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 115.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁶⁰ Christian Jayakumar, *Powerlessness of the Poor: Toward an Alternative Kingdom of God Based Paradigms of Response*. Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary Ph.D, thesis, 1994.

⁶¹ Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 65.

embracing “mutual brokenness.”⁶² The god-complex takes away volunteers ability to see the value and dignity of others. Corbett and Fikkert importantly emphasizes that the god-complex hurts the giver as much as it hurts the receiver, and notes that it is one way people with material resources damage their relationship with God. Disappointingly, Corbett and Fikkert’s only stories are of direct services hurting the receiver. But the conclusion is clear: direct service charity contributes to poverty being identified as individual rather than systemic, and helps to perpetuate stereotypes of people without material resources as broken, and people who have extra to give away as especially blessed. Shared ministry needs to break down stereotypes of those who are food insecure and but also the stereotypes of those who have food to share.

Inhibiting Relationship Building and Blocking Evangelism

Stereotypes also keep churches engaged in direct service ministry from recognizing the people they serve as potential members of their congregations, from seeing “them” as invited to become one of “us”. This is a failure to evangelize, that is, a failure to share good news, a failure to welcome neighbors, a failure to see others as one of us. It is important that evangelism is not confused with converting people to middle class values, nor that faith necessarily brings about material resources, nor that people who are food insecure do not already have faith, but rather that good news is something that neighbors and friends can seek together. Corbett and Fikkert emphasize that there are many ways people are separated from God⁶³ and until we recognize that we equally need of Jesus’ healing grace our direct service ministry will hurt those we serve.⁶⁴

⁶² Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 64.

⁶³ Corbett and Fikkert use the phrase “spiritual poverty” to describe separation from God. In Chapter Four, I will discuss this in contrast to Gustavo Gutiérrez’s use of the phrase “spiritual poverty” to describe being close to God.

⁶⁴ Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 64.

Although they have argued that poverty does not equal lack of faith, and tell a story of the incredible faithfulness of a group of slum dwellers in another country,⁶⁵ Corbett and Fikkert also say it takes believing in Jesus to have the lasting life changes that end poverty.⁶⁶ Their primary concern is that many who live with material poverty do not have a “biblical worldview” of themselves as responsible to dominate creation,⁶⁷ to fulfill their calling to work,⁶⁸ and to engage in Christian stewardship.⁶⁹ Corbett and Fikkert go as far as to suggest that helping a person to get a decent income without helping them develop a biblical worldview would be disastrous,⁷⁰ although they offer no explanation of what the disaster would be. However, alone among those arguing for evangelism as part of our mission, Corbett and Fikkert are careful to note that it is not only those with material poverty that need a redeemed world view, those of us with plenty need redemption from secularism, materialism and relativism.⁷¹ Still their argument is dangerously close to identifying non-belief in Jesus as a primary cause of poverty. Direct service ministries as evangelistic endeavors risk confusing the concepts.

Stivers argues that several of the mission sites she studied presume that poverty is caused by lack of faith. In one location she found promotional materials that emphasize how participants are converted away from bad past decisions to new decisions based on God’s guidance. The focus is that their newly found faith is what saved them, even when their pasts show huge

⁶⁵ Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 69.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 192.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 88.

systemic barriers that were clearly not of their own making.⁷² While some ministries focused on conversion, and others on modeling Christian behavior, all of the ministries in her study identified spirituality as essentially a way toward finding a path out of poverty.⁷³ She notes at one location a staff person said: “the cause of homelessness is mainly spiritual, not economic”.⁷⁴ In contrast to Corbett and Fikkert, Stivers is specifically critiquing the way church-based direct service ministry has a goal of giving people with material poverty a biblical worldview.⁷⁵ She is frustrated that some direct service ministries identify poverty as spiritual, rather than material.

For other writers the challenge is not as much the nature of poverty, but the nature of evangelism. Their argument is that treating people who live with material poverty as neighbors and as friends would improve direct service ministries. David Apple, in *More than a Soup Kitchen*, offers detailed advice for making meals ministries more about relationships and redemption. He presumes that the primary purpose of direct service ministry is evangelism, but the style he promotes is “friendship evangelism”—getting to know people who come to eat.⁷⁶ He shares a tragic story of an addict who knew the bible inside out but did not know Jesus (presumably Apple knows this because the man continued in his addictions) and then died alone on the street. It is not clear if the tragedy includes the man’s early death or is only the fact that he died an unbeliever.⁷⁷ Apple’s stories do show a deep concern for the struggle of people in

⁷² Stivers, *Disrupting Homelessness*, 78.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 76,

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 78,

⁷⁶ David S. Apple, *Not Just a Soup Kitchen: How Mercy Ministry in the Local Church Transforms Us All*, Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publications, 2014, Kindle, loc. 610.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, loc. 777.

poverty, especially people living with addictions, and he notices that addicts he meets generally describe themselves as losers, as unworthy of a better life, as unworthy of services to help them.⁷⁸ He is sympathetic to the way that people living with poverty and addictions are plagued by more than a lack of material resources. Unfortunately, he presumes that a sense of unworthiness is a sign of a lack of faith, and that that lack of faith is the primary block to getting material needs met.⁷⁹ He identifies personal brokenness (which for him is lack of Jesus) as the primary obstacle to food security. His compassionate approach is damaged by his presumption that lack of faith causes poverty.

Jay Pathak and David Runyon in *The Art of Neighboring* are not addressing direct service charity, but the role of relationship building to evangelism. They argue that Jesus's call to love our neighbors was not meant to be an abstract love of people, but actually getting to know, and love, actual people nearby.⁸⁰ They are critiquing the inclination to reach out to "others" while failing to get to know the people next door.⁸¹ Pathak and Runyon appropriately complicate evangelism by suggesting that it starts with relationships rather than a particular worldview. Heuertz and Pohl note that evangelism projects often presume that Christians have both the good news and the material resources that others need. They have found that getting to know people as friends lead them to the discovery that people in need have more resources than they thought, and that Jesus is more present in their communities.⁸² Heuertz and Pohl learned that ministry

⁷⁸ Apple, *Not Just a Soup Kitchen*, loc. 852.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, loc. 635.

⁸⁰ Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon, *The Art of Neighboring: Building Genuine Relationships Right Outside Your Door*, Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 2012, Ebook, 35.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁸² Heuertz and Pohl, *Friendship at the Margins*, 19.

with friends rather than *to* individuals allows the ministers to see the way God is already at work.⁸³ They notice that direct service missions generally presume that the people with plenty will invite guests (who have little) to eat with them, but starting with friendship allows the missionaries to be guests at the home of someone who has little.⁸⁴ Heuertz and Pohl's idea that evangelism can be done *with* others, rather than *to* them, is instructive for direct service charity and essential for shared ministry. Evangelism that presumes that lack of faith causes poverty is unkind, but also simply incorrect; there are many people of faith living in poverty. But presuming that churches engaged in direct service ministry should not engage in evangelism is to identify people who need material resources as unworthy of being welcomed as one of "us."

Church-based direct service food ministries generally engage in evangelism because it sees the faith of people who are food insecure as inadequate, or avoids evangelism because it is inconceivable that people without enough food are able to be part of the church. In the context of shared ministry, evangelism, that is, sharing good news, is the ministry of creating a community that people (with and without food security) are encouraged to join, more than sharing a specific theology. Shared ministry engages in evangelism by building deep, long-term relationships, by sharing faith, and by learning from someone else's faith. It requires recognizing that people who are seeking additional food resources may feel unworthy, not because they do not have gifts, or do not have faith, but because stereotypes have encouraged them to see systemic barriers as their own fault. Shared ministry engages in evangelism by eating together, and working together, so that people know each other well enough to point out their strengths and skills.

⁸³ Heuertz and Pohl, *Friendship at the Margins*, 33.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.

Failing to Recognize the Gifts of People Food Insecure People

People who are food insecure have varied gifts and skills in the same way that people who give away food have varied gifts and skills. Direct service ministry can perpetuate stereotypes and presumptions about who is qualified to volunteer. The result leads to hiding both the strengths of the people who do not have enough, and the weaknesses of those who have enough to give away. Corbett and Fikkert note that paternalism makes people with enough resources assume that they also have a more mature spirituality, more knowledge,⁸⁵ more ability to do the work that needs to be done, and certainly are more skilled program managers⁸⁶ than the people who need additional food. They note that volunteers engage in ministry with more money and more power than those in need. “All of us—myself included—do strange things in the presence of money and power.”⁸⁷ Whether intended, or noticed, outsider’s help represents both money and power. Corbett and Fikkert tell of visiting a mission project where they saved the life of a woman who was seriously ill with a low-cost medication. They later realized that the people in the local church where they were visiting, while poor, had the ability to provide the medication. The church community knew the woman, had built relationships with her, and could have bought the medication.⁸⁸ They note that at the time it felt good to be the helpers, but in retrospect the help reduced her connection to her people in the local community. Helping hurts people when we do things for people that they can do themselves.⁸⁹

As with this church, Corbett and Fikkert are clear that people who have little material

⁸⁵ Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 116.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 115.

wealth have significant gifts and skills that can contribute to effective ministries. They argue that participation should not be forced, or token, but rather “poor communities, churches, and families participate in planning, implementing, and evaluating the interventions in their lives.”⁹⁰ They trust that people in need have the skills to direct the services they need and argue for starting with people’s strengths rather than needs. Corbett and Fikkert argue that poverty causes dysfunctional thinking, rather than dysfunctional thinking causing poverty, and therefore are emphatic that ministries must start by building up people’s strengths.⁹¹ Outside of emergencies, they say it is better to leave a need unmet rather than accidentally do something that a community can do themselves,⁹² thus allowing space for the community to step up and show the skills they have in caring for one another. Corbett and Fikkert are right that making space for input from people who need the program will allow new leaders to step forward, and that all people, with and without material resources, “through trial and error, [can] unpack and unfold the wonders of God’s creation.”⁹³ The work of meeting a community’s needs includes mistakes and missteps; people with enough resources should not presume it is fine to step in and interfere with the process of making mistakes and fixing them.

Kevin Blue, in *Practical Justice* suggests direct service is necessary, but needs to be adjusted to promote the dignity of people who are food insecure: “[d]irect relief of another’s suffering is a high form of love. Sometimes it requires our money; frequently it requires our time. But most of all it requires that we see the value and dignity of each person we interact

⁹⁰ Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 171.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 127.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 145.

with.”⁹⁴ He worries that direct service ministries take away a person’s need to work, and the personal growth and skill development that would come from solving their own problems.⁹⁵ He argues that when people with few material resources spend time without work or other responsibilities it wears down their problem-solving skills and their self-confidence. He notes that “[s]ome have not worked for so long that evil spiritual habits become the norm, and then, as sin deceives them, they are convinced that working is actually worse for them than receiving a hand-out.”⁹⁶ Blue recognizes that there are people who cannot get paid work, due to illness or disability, but fails to acknowledge the problem solving required to get through everyday life when living with poverty. He argues that direct service charity should be partnerships and program leaders should recognize what people without material resources contribute, “if only themselves.”⁹⁷ People who need material resources bring important gifts, and partnerships contribute to the equality between the givers and receivers. Yet Blue minimizes his own statement by adding *if only themselves*. While there are some people who are so wounded it is only themselves they can bring, the majority of food insecure people have many gifts and skills. It is a failed commitment to equality that hides people’s skills.

Failing to Honor the Knowledge of People Who Are Food Insecure

Direct service ministry does not honor the knowledge of the people who need material resources. Saul Alinsky’s idea of partnership focuses on the skills and dreams of people without material resources. Alinsky’s *Reveille for Radicals* and *Rules for Radicals* are foundational texts

⁹⁴ Blue, Kevin, *Practical Justice: Living Off-Center in a Self-Centered World*, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 2013, Kindle, loc. 571.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, loc. 671.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, loc. 635.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, loc. 670.

for community organizing and highlight that one begins with listening as the people in need name what they really need and want.⁹⁸ Those with enough resources must open their eyes to what is happening in places that are somewhat foreign, unwelcoming, and uncomfortable. When engaging with impoverished communities, Alinsky invites those with material resources to look for those parts of poverty that are generally hidden. He is certain that will make those who have enough understand that they need the system change as well. Alinsky insists “[a] major revolution to be won in the immediate future is the dissipation of man’s illusion that his own welfare can be separate from that of all others.”⁹⁹ We are in this together.

Together, organizers and those who need resources, must listen for the challenges caused by food insecurity. Listening for what people who are food insecure want makes it so there is a partnership creating community solutions. “If you respect the dignity of the individual you are working with, then his *[sic]* desires, not yours; his values, not yours; his ways of working and fighting, not yours; his programs, not yours, are important and must be followed.”¹⁰⁰ For Alinsky, community organizers may help a community overcome apathy, but their primary job is to follow the lead of the people in need. Organizers gather people around the obvious obstacles, poverty, limits on food stamps, the shortage of food markets in low-income neighborhoods, the high cost of fresh food, but a program will only be effective if the people who need the resources are the ones designing it.¹⁰¹ This will take time. It takes time to build up trust that people with

⁹⁸ Saul D. Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals: A Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals*, New York: Random House, 1971, 12.

⁹⁹ Alinsky, Saul D, *Reveille for Radicals*, New York: Vintage Books, 1989, 22.

¹⁰⁰ Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*, 122.

¹⁰¹ Alinsky, *Reveille for Radicals*, 55.

enough actually respect the dignity of people who are food insecure¹⁰² It cannot include treating people as childlike and unable to care for themselves,¹⁰³ and it cannot treat individuals as the cause of poverty.

Alinsky would argue that failing to use the strengths and resources of people in need is simply ineffective. There are already leaders and people with skills, in every community,¹⁰⁴ and community organizing requires identifying “natural leaders”—Alinsky’s term for people that the community already looks toward for guidance.¹⁰⁵ Outsiders tend to look for leaders who are like themselves,¹⁰⁶ thereby missing that leadership is culturally defined, and specific to each local community.¹⁰⁷ For Alinsky, organizers, and other leaders that want to simply give things away will not be respected. Alinsky found that “generally their method of doing things *for* rather than *with* the people was resented.”¹⁰⁸ Direct service that is designed by outsiders *for* people in need is not actually helpful. “To give people help, while denying them a significant part in the action, contributes nothing to the development of the individual. In the deepest sense it is not giving but taking—taking their dignity.”¹⁰⁹ People both know what they need, and deserve the opportunity to create what they need and direct service charity that fails to provide that is not a gift.

You don’t, you dare not, come to a people who are unemployed, who don’t know where their next meal is coming from, whose children and themselves are in the gutter of

¹⁰² Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*, 122.

¹⁰³ Alinsky, *Reveille for Radicals*, 100.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹⁰⁷ For more on this, see Chapter Four.

¹⁰⁸ Alinsky, *Reveille for Radicals*, 58, *italics original*.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 123.

despair—and offer them not food, not jobs, not security, but supervised recreation, handicraft classes and character building. Yet *that is what is done!*¹¹⁰

This list suggests direct service food ministry would be acceptable charity for Alinsky, while character building, common in job training programs, would not. In contrast Corbett and Fikkert, Lupton, and Blue identify job training and character building as essential components of effective direct service ministries. Alinsky argues the most important component of community organizing is that the people who need the services and resources are included in the planning. The shared ministry approach that is proposed in this project does the same.

Starting with Needs Rather Than Gifts and Skills

Direct service ministry identifies people who need material resources as only needs, failing to see their gifts and skills. Stephen Bouman, a Lutheran priest who uses community organizing as his principal tool for creating congregational vitality, agrees with Alinsky that it is important to know and see the environment where people in need live, but he starts with asking about how God is working within them,¹¹¹ identifying their gifts rather than their needs. Church for him is the place to create partnerships around a shared table—shared between people with enough and people in need. *The Mission Table* takes the interesting approach that a church's mission to serve people in need, and the mission to reach out to share the good news, are the same tasks. Using the idea of solidarity from Gustavo Gutierrez, Bouman notes that a church's goal should not be connections only with people similar to us, or only to members of our church, or only to people who *like* us, but rather our goal should be to be made whole by gathering at a

¹¹⁰ Alinsky, *Reveille for Radicals*, 58 *italics original*.

¹¹¹ Stephen Bouman, *The Mission Table: Renewing Congregation and Community*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2013, 31.

the table in solidarity with people who are very different from us.¹¹² Solidarity requires we recognize that both people with and people without material resources have needs, in his case Bouman suggests that the church needs healing, which is as significant as people in poverty's need for things. Corbett and Fikkert make the same point, except that they focus on healing for individual Christians.

Jennifer Ayres, in *Good Food: Grounded Practical Theology*, argues that church-based food ministries should be about more than needing food. She is concerned with “community food security” which, rather than addressing only individual’s access to food, considers “hunger, nutrition, community self-reliance, and economic health.”¹¹³ Her concern is not only whether individuals get food, but also whether they get healthy food, and whether food production is supporting the entire economy of the neighborhood. Ayres wants food ministries to be about creating community. She says “[e]ven now, when the beloved community gathers around the table, we affirm that there we receive sustenance, we build relationships, and hear a challenge to seek flourishing in the world.”¹¹⁴ Ayres uses Letty Russell’s language around table theology, emphasizing that sharing food includes sharing authority¹¹⁵ and becoming interconnected.¹¹⁶ Food ministries that focus on identifying which people are food insecure or which are not miss the opportunity to create a public shared meal.¹¹⁷ She does not use the phrase “shared ministry”

¹¹² Bouman, *The Mission Table*, 10.

¹¹³ Jennifer Ayres, *Good Food: Grounded Practical Theology*, Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013, 22.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

but notes that sharing food “disrupts the notion of host and guest, work and worship, and roles and relationships”,¹¹⁸ which I argue comes from sharing the work of food ministry. With Alinsky, Ayres emphasizes that by working together the community as a whole can decide what food is available and how much is available.¹¹⁹ She is talking about controlling not just cooking and distribution, but about overseeing the crops, harvesting, and caring for the land. Ayres argues that in the Christian context food is not just about eating; it is about building community.¹²⁰

The critiques of direct service ministry argue that people who receive food have the skills to do more than accept food, and that food ministries that do not appreciate those skills are not helpful. While Corbett and Fikkert argue that direct service is inappropriate, I maintain that changing direct service ministry to shared ministry overcomes that problem. It is not enough to treat people who come to get food as guests; that creates hospitality but not partnership. Direct service offers food from gardens to gifted gardeners, asks experienced retailers to accept the way the food pantry is set-up, and ask cooks to eat the food they are not allowed to help cook. Shared ministry recognizes that the people who come to food programs come with knowledge, gifts, and skills that we need to help run those programs and creates a partnership between those who need food and those who have resources to provide it.

Maintaining Isolation, Fear, and Oppression

Direct service ministry can maintain the isolation and fear that creates oppression in U.S. society. What is it that keeps people who want to help other people from getting to know the people being served, from appreciating people in need as having gifts, from seeing through

¹¹⁸ Ayres, *Good Food*, 130.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 114.

stereotypes? What is it that keeps church-based programs from making room to see those who eat as resources to help? What keeps volunteers and staff from crossing over boundaries and building relationships in food ministries? The segregation of our nation, and our churches, by race and class make it so that many people do not know those who are different than they are. Isolation creates fear, and fear sets up both emotional and physical barriers. Racism, classism, sexism, and other forms of oppression normalize the idea that people without material resources ought to behave similarly to people with plenty of resources. Oppression hides reality.

Oppression causes, and is maintained by, isolation. Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon are concerned that isolation is so extreme today that people do not even know those who live next door.¹²¹ They analyze isolation, fear, and the difficulty of crossing economic boundaries. They note that isolation is pervasive in U.S. life; middle class homes keep many relegated to fenced back yards. Many people in the U.S. live in segregated neighborhoods. Most are isolated from people of a different race or a different income level. Pathak and Runyon note that for many of us our neighbors are unknown; fear grows because “it’s easy to imagine the worst”¹²².

Misunderstandings grow out of fear. They offer a prime example of a broken down home that implies lack of care, lack of motivation, perhaps even drugs or alcohol, only to learn the occupant is away caring for a sick family member.¹²³ Not getting to know our neighbors separates us, perpetuating fear.

Pathak and Runyon note fear distorts images of other people, and also distorts a person’s perception of how others see them.¹²⁴ This develops a circle of distrust, where each person is

¹²¹ Pathak and Runyon, *The Art of Neighboring*, 35.

¹²² Ibid., 30.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 64.

guessing what the other is thinking, and that guessing garbles any knowledge of the other person. Fear, Pathak argues, makes people see themselves as less than. They are afraid the other will break down their importance and take away their power.¹²⁵ In contrast, a critique of direct service ministry is that the people who are leading are trying to hold on to power, and to their own importance—Corbett and Fikkert’s description of the god complex. What may be true is a complicated version of Pathak and Runyon’s argument: that volunteers at food ministries hold onto rules and boundaries out of fear that power is limited, so the fear is that if people who need the food take on that power, there will not be power left over for the volunteers. Whether individuals start with the belief that they are less valuable than others, and thus are afraid of being found out, or with the belief that they are more valuable, knowledgeable, or responsible than others, and thus should be in charge, probably depends on the person. In either case, when people in charge refuse to share power the result is to take away the power and importance of others. The fear that power is limited has the unexpected, and usually unintended, effect of *making* our power unequal. Unequal power cultivates fear.

Pathak and Runyon suggest the answer to fear is discernment. People creating ministries that attempt to cross boundaries must recognize and separate the real and imagined risks.¹²⁶ People must be allowed, and helped, to name what they are afraid of, and people with more experience need to provide information as to which fears are realistic and which are not. As Stivers has noted, much of the differences people imagine are the result of systemic stereotypes. Most of people’s fears, when named, will be recognized as improbable risks. Pathak and Runyon suggest that much of what is called fear is simply timidity. They argue that people must choose

¹²⁵ Pathak and Runyon, *The Art of Neighboring*, 66.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

to push through fear to make the connections the gospel insists upon, people must recognize that “awkwardness isn’t fear—it’s just nervousness about possible rejection. The truth is, awkwardness won’t kill you.”¹²⁷ Perhaps it will not kill the awkward person with material resources, but if it prevents real relationships then direct service charity becomes toxic, and may become deadly to those being served. Bouman notices this anxiety and awkwardness also keep congregations from engaging in the neighborhoods around them and keeps them from building partnerships. Bouman notes many churches allow their anxiety around congregational survival to pull them away from the perceived risk of partnership-style ministries.¹²⁸ Many congregations are not willing to take the risks needed to actually meet our neighbors, hear their stories, and, most importantly, recognize their gifts. As a result, the church fails to get the healing that comes from engaging diversity. Isolation and fear keep people separated, limiting Christians’ and churches’ ability to live out the gospel, and hurting people who need material resources.

While an individual can choose to overcome their personal fear and break the cycle of isolation by going to places where there are people who are different from them, oppression keeps people with material resources from developing solidarity with people who do not have material resources. Oppression is systemic. That is, an individual can resist it, but cannot simply end it alone. Oppression can be based on race, gender, disability, immigration status, education, and more. Most importantly to the relationship between people who have less resources and people who have more, is unjust power dynamics based on class—classism. Like fear and isolation, learning to see classism helps individuals to resist it. Unlike fear and isolation, for people with ample resources to see oppression requires recognizing their own role in creating a

¹²⁷ Pathak and Runyon, *The Art of Neighboring*, 67.

¹²⁸ Bouman, *The Mission Table*, 10.

society where poverty exists. In describing “The Broken American System” Corbett and Fikkert point out that racism causes poverty.¹²⁹

In the literature reviewed for this project Corbett and Fikkert are alone among the U.S. white male authors in explicitly mentioning oppression, and they touch it quite carefully, as if concerned with hurting their evangelical readers. The men of color and the women I read all included oppression as central to their discussions on poverty. Oppression is generally hidden from those who gain from it, and class-based oppression creates the assumption that people with enough material resources are more able serve than people who live with poverty. When people are trying to engage in helping people living in poverty, but fail to identify oppression as one of the forces working against people who are poor, it is easy for them to assume that if people who are poor would just act more like people who are not poor, poverty could be ended.

Classism assumes that people in poverty should assimilate into the culture of people who have enough. Stivers notes that the dominant social discourse in the U.S. privileges white and middle class values¹³⁰ and presumes that people with those values will not become poor. Corbett and Fikkert’s critique is similar. One of the ways direct service ministries live that out is by denying the significance of race, gender, and class, and therefore being very careful to treat every person the same, even though their culture and needs may be quite different. This reinforces the superiority of white and middle class culture as the norm.¹³¹ Direct service charity that does not acknowledge and affirm differences in language, culture, and values based on race and class are not really getting to know the depth of people’s lives. Direct service ministries are requiring

¹²⁹ Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 91 and elsewhere.

¹³⁰ Stivers, *Disrupting Homelessness*, 13.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

assimilation when they set rules of behavior without engaging the people who need the services in setting the rules. The challenge is to accept people as they are, now, with all the quirks and idiosyncrasies and unusual behaviors they have learned on life's journey, and with all the culture and heritage they claim for themselves. It is not helpful to require people to develop a new culture in order to receive (or for that matter give) assistance.

In his book *Do No Harm* Stephen G. Ray Jr. suggests that requiring assimilation is not just unhelpful, in the Christian context, it is sin. Ray suggests that church communities aim to “render our ecclesial, economic, social positions and perspectives normative.”¹³² That is, they think of their way as the ordinary way, and other's ways as, at least, different, odd, or wrong, and possibly, sinful. This privilege to define oneself as normative exists in every context and allows even oppressed groups to find another group to wield power over.¹³³ Specific to issues of class, it is important to recognize that historically “the cultural and economic ethos of Protestantism, whether expressed in the Lutheran notion of calling or the Calvinist ideal of work, provided fertile ground for the development of Western bourgeois culture and vice versa.”¹³⁴ It was people who had material resources who developed the concept of the “Protestant work ethic” which has been used to encourage people without resources to work harder, to blame them for not working, and to build a culture where having work is a sign of God's grace. That result was not necessary, Ray argues Protestants could have developed a culture where the social sin was a community failing to provide work for those who want it.¹³⁵ The Protestant work ethic has contributed to,

¹³² Stephen G. Ray Jr., *Do No Harm: Social Sin and Christian Responsibility*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003, 130.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 100.

and perhaps has created, the idea that people without work need to be fixed. It gives our society permission to oppress those who do not have jobs.

Oppression allows people to see individual problems such as a person not working, but disguises systemic ones, such as the unavailability of work or the insufficiency of pay rates for work. Corbett and Fikkert touch on this frequently, and gently. They describe the federal government razing inner city communities occupied mostly by African Americans for urban renewal and highway programs and Federal Housing Authority policies that “both explicitly and implicitly discriminated against African Americans.”¹³⁶ They note that in the U.S. economic systems work well for Anglo-American evangelicals like themselves, which can blind them to the systemic causes of poverty and instead encourage them to look for individual failings.¹³⁷ Corbett and Fikkert are clear that oppression exists, and that people with material resources need to recognize it, and that good community development work will include the people in need at all levels of the work. They are less clear of the church’s role in maintaining oppression.

Some of what makes healing oppression difficult is that it requires that people with enough see themselves, not only as contributing to the solution, but also as part of the problem. Classism gives people with material resources power and hides their responsibility for creating the oppressive system. Corbett and Fikkert provide a detailed account of the way that our direct service charity is, either intentionally or unintentionally, paternalistic. They argue that paternalism is what makes people who want to give resources and services a part of the problem of poverty. They consider North American middle-class Christians as paternalistic when they attempt direct service charity, although they are not always careful to make the class distinction.

¹³⁶ Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 91.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 93.

Paternalistic thought patterns lead people to do things for people in need, rather than to support people in need doing for themselves. Corbett and Fikkert connect this to power:

Middle-to-upper-class North American believers have to accept that their power has silenced their brethren [*sic*] at home and abroad more than we realize. People who have power seldom think about that power, while people who do not have it are very aware that they do not.¹³⁸

Their example is from short-term mission trips to other countries, but the power differential is just as true in local direct service ministries. Corbett and Fikkert note that people who need resources internalize colonialist, classist, and racist notions: Caucasians give, People of Color receive; middle and upper class values are better than the values of people who are poor; and letting people with enough run programs often will bring more resources that are not otherwise offered.¹³⁹ Yet the authors do not connect their questions about cross-cultural engagement in short-term missions to other countries to the cultural differences between people of different classes within the United States. Their analysis of how time is different in different cultures and how the balance of individualism and community is different is helpful for people hoping to engage across difference, although a little too absolute—for example he says people in the west lean toward a sense of time as linear and a sense of the priority of the individual over the community,¹⁴⁰ while really these views are quite diverse in the United States outside of white middle and upper-class circles.

Heurtz and Pohl are looking for a complete change in church produced by crossing boundaries: “[f]riendships that cross the divisions of class, education, race, gender, ethnicity, age

¹³⁸ Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 172.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 165.

and ability are crucial for reconciliation and for the life of the church.”¹⁴¹ They argue that we cannot find full reconciliation without engagement with the other. Kevin Blue likewise argues that people who want to help people who do not have enough must want to be in relationship with the people they aim to help. They must recognize that they need them. To be reconciled with one another, people must create relationships across race and class divisions.¹⁴² That requires figuring out how to deal with fear and awkwardness, which keep people from creating relationships with people who are different from them. Without addressing fear, direct service charities further enforce segregation. I hope, and Blue presumes, that in church-based charities the goal is more than simply providing food; the goal is to welcome one another into the family of Christ.¹⁴³ For Blue, this is a welcome to be converted to Christianity. For me, the family of Christ is large enough to welcome people on any faith journey. The relational work of the church is inviting people who are food insecure to be part of our church, part of our ministry, even leaders of our program. It is in large part classism (and other forms of oppression) that keeps us from loving our neighbors enough to welcome them to be one of us.

Love of our neighbor is shown with action, not simply words about love. Blue notes that “Jesus’ love—by which the world is to able to identify believers—was costly and sacrificial. It meant the relinquishing of power; it meant humility, it meant a coming and dwelling among people.”¹⁴⁴ Christians are called to follow Jesus with sacrificial love as they feed people. Ministries that serve food without the underpinning of sacrificial love for our neighbor are not meeting Jesus’ command to share food, drink, and clothing. Blue argues that racial and class

¹⁴¹ Heuertz and Pohl, *Friendship at the Margins*, 19.

¹⁴² Blue, *Practical Justice*, loc. 964,

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, loc. 969.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, loc. 981.

divides are ultimately broken down when God's people choose to be a bridge across those divides, bringing the gospel not only in the food but in the words shared with one another.¹⁴⁵

Oppression is resisted when people who are different share food together.

Ray uses the phrase *sin-talk* to describe the derogatory language used to describe people who are outside the social norm. Sin-talk maintains oppression. Stephen Ray investigates sin as a social, rather than individual, construct, and shows how sin-talk maintains cultural oppression. Ray identifies two types of sin-talk that hurt our communities. The first connects the “social margin” with irresponsibility, for example the idea that people on the margin created their own difficulties by being irresponsible.¹⁴⁶ Ray uses language for this that is similar to language I explored in Stivers’ and Corbett and Fikkert’s analysis. The second type of sin-talk essentializes communities on the margins by suggesting everyone of a particular identity is defiled.¹⁴⁷ It is not bad choices that put people in the category of sinfulness, but their very existence. While it is uncommon to use the word sin for this,¹⁴⁸ it is typical to group individuals into a class of their own and then use language that presumes a singular, sinful, identity of that class.

It is, in the end, personal and social sin that keeps people who care about others from engaging in direct service charity in ways that know and honor the people in need, in ways that share the gift of giving, in ways that build community. To get beyond toxic direct service charity people with enough material resources must face the difficulty that their own sinfulness is the same, un-chosen, unseen, and yet forgiven, as the sinfulness of the people the ministry engages.

For shared ministry to address this it must include strategies to build awareness of each person's

¹⁴⁵ Blue, *Practical Justice*, loc. 990.

¹⁴⁶ Ray, *Do No Harm*, 34.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 10.

own sinfulness *and* to accept people the way they are now. By working together, and eating together, shared ministry has the potential to overcome the isolation that keeps people with food security and people with food insecurity apart. Fear can be reduced by knowing one another as equals, which can reduce stereotyping, which will help to resist classism. In a best case scenario, shared ministry will resist oppression by reducing sin-talk and helping all involved to see the systemic nature of classism.

Conclusion to Chapter Two

To overcome the problems with direct service charity, shared ministry must start with the needs and dreams of people who are food insecure, must recognize the systemic nature of poverty and not blame it on individuals, must bring people together, must resist stereotypes, and must welcome people to belong to our community. Shared ministry will improve on direct service charity if it recognizes that people have gifts and skills and creates an environment that uses those gifts and skills. Shared ministry must resist oppression and stereotyping by overcoming isolation and fear. In Chapters Three and Four, I will explore the biblical arguments for engaging in shared ministry, and then the arguments from liberation theology to start with people who need resources and to enlarge the leadership table in church-based food ministries.

CHAPTER THREE: THE BIBLE AND SHARED MINISTRY

In light of the concerns with direct service ministry described in Chapter Two, this chapter turns to two biblical stories that address sharing food: the judging of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31-46, and the neglected widows in Acts 6:1-7. These texts clearly point to the imperative to offer food to those in need; further, they point to the reality that people who are food insecure and do not have sufficient material resources are still expected to meet the biblical imperative to serve people in need. Food ministry is not only about eating, but about getting a turn to serve. Food ministries guided by scripture must provide food as well as a way to belong to community. In this chapter, a cultural studies hermeneutic orientation is necessary for understanding and critiquing these texts in the context of shared food ministries. A cultural studies approach makes space for all readers to read texts, including those participating in shared food ministries.

A Cultural Studies Hermeneutic

While each person reads a biblical text with their own eyes, ears, and understanding, traditional scholarly biblical interpretation has started with the presumption that the properly educated reader only, by being objective and disinterested, can reconstruct the original historical context of a text, its meaning, and the intent of the writer or writers. In his article “And They Began to Speak in Other Tongues” in *Reading from this Place Vol 1: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States*, and in his book *Decolonizing Biblical Studies*, Fernando F. Segovia proposes the theoretical use of *cultural studies* to attend to the text as a

construction and to recognize that the reader is part of the interpretative process. Other authors use language like *post-colonial* and *bi-cultural* to signify a similar hermeneutic. Segovia and other ideological critics argue that all interpretations, educated or not, are influenced by the social location and biases of the present day readers of the text. What is important for this project is that I am privileging these assumptions when I engage the texts below. Unlike the dominant ways of reading a text, I am acknowledging that my reading is subjective, and I am assuming there are a diversity of readers, leading toward creating an impressive collection of meanings for the text. In other words, a cultural studies approach frees biblical criticism from searching for one ultimate meaning, and instead recognizes that a text speaks differently and in different ways. For this project it is especially important to acknowledge that cultural studies makes room for readers who are disadvantaged, less educated, or more impressionistic, including readers who do not have material resources or are food insecure, to create their own space to include their interpretation into the mix of possible readings of the text. These additional voices make a difference in how these texts inform church-based food ministries.

Segovia proposes that present day biblical criticism can be broadly categorized into three groups, with a fourth just developing. *Historical criticism* covers strategies that describe the writer's intent and the social world in which the text was written,¹ seeking the original, earliest, meaning, with the interpreter hidden.² *Literary criticism* is concerned with finding meaning in the text itself,³ recognizing that the whole literary text (story), as it exists now, including edits and changes subsequent to the original writing, contains meaning. In literary criticism the

¹ Fernando F. Segovia, "“And they began to speak in other tongues”: Competing modes of discourse in contemporary biblical criticism" in *Reading from this Place Vol 1: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995, 6.

² *Ibid.*, 13.

³ Segovia, "And they began to speak", 19.

interpreter is either hidden in the story world (text-dominant understandings) or exposed in front of the text (reader-dominant understandings).⁴ *Cultural criticism* finds the meaning in the culture of the community behind the text; this meaning is inscribed in the social language (e.g., love one another) and worldviews (e.g., honor/shame) found within the text; the interpreter is hidden in the social world of the text.⁵ With the exception of the reader-dominant approaches of literary criticism, these three models assume that the present day reader of the text can be, and must be, neutral and impartial to find the meaning.⁶ The meaning is in the original text and author (historical criticism), in the literary text (literary criticism), and in the social world in which the text was created (cultural criticism) and not with the present day reader. Segovia notes that a well-trained reader who thinks they can be neutral, combined with the fact that most academic biblical interpretation is done by European and European American scholars, results in “Europeanization” of interpretations.⁷ I will add that it is also a “middle-classification” of interpretation—there is not significant “neutral” scholarship from the viewpoint of people without significant material resources. For Segovia, the insistence that there is such a thing as a neutral, impartial, distant reading is essentially continued colonization of the biblical text.⁸ Thus Segovia proposes a fourth approach: *cultural studies* where “readers now fully foregrounding themselves as flesh-and-blood readers, variously situated and engaged in their own social locations.”⁹ He argues that, regardless of education, real-readers are unable to transcend their

⁴ Segovia, “And they began to speak”, 17.

⁵ Ibid., 22.

⁶ Ibid., 25.

⁷ Ibid., 30.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 31.

social and historical identity and a variety of voices are needed to participate in the construction of interpretations.¹⁰ Thus, all readings are subjective and many subjective interpretations contribute to understanding the text.

Segovia warns that readers cannot see, much less transcend, the world behind the text objectively and that each reader's social location contributes to the meaning they find. Thus readers must acknowledge and accept many diverse readings, each one accessed through a specific reader's cultural context.¹¹ The end goal of cultural studies is not a single new meaning to a text, but rather "radical plurality."¹² The many meanings are dependent on the context and identity of many readers. The cultural studies methodology integrates analysis from more traditional hermeneutics, but keeps the "situated and interested reader" at the center of the critique.¹³ Segovia uses "interested" to describe a reader that is explicitly *not* the disinterested reader of historical criticism—"removed" from their own social location. Segovia aims to include "real readers,"¹⁴ those who may or may not have education in critical biblical scholarship. "[T]he traditional distinction between high and low is collapsed;"¹⁵ the educated critic is no longer standing between the ordinary reader and the text. The presumption that the reader can, or will, set aside their theological presumptions is gone.¹⁶ The reader does not claim

¹⁰ Segovia, "And they began to speak", 28.

¹¹ Ibid., 31.

¹² Fernando F. Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies: A View from the Margins*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 2000, 37.

¹³ Ibid., 41.

¹⁴ Ibid., 42.

¹⁵ Ibid., 47.

¹⁶ Ibid., 48.

to be objective and must learn to “read themselves” in order to see how their social location is contributing to their interpretation.¹⁷

At the same time Gale Yee in “The Author/Text/Reader and Power” cautions against giving all the power to the reader; she insists on balancing the place of reader, text, and author somewhat equally.¹⁸ Additionally, the text’s purpose or intended use may not be in the meaning but in its power to persuade or evoke a response.¹⁹ Yee asks: “which power groups and interests does my reading serve or not serve?”²⁰ William Myers in “The Hermeneutical Dilemma of an African American Biblical Student” argues against criticism that limits the importance of oral traditions and the language of minorities.²¹ Kwok Pui-Lan in “Racism and Ethnocentrism in Feminist Biblical Interpretation” is similarly concerned with the importance of aural and experiential approaches that are “superfluous” to traditional criticism but important to many cultures.²² Together Myers and Kwok are adding additional readers to the cultural studies hermeneutic, those who hear the text and speak their interpretations, rather than limiting readers to people who read, and then write in response to text. Eryl Davies, in *Biblical Criticism: A Guide for the Perplexed* notes different interpretations of a text have different purposes and not

¹⁷ Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies*, 90.

¹⁸ Gale Yee, “The Author/Text/Reader and Power: Suggestions for a Critical Framework for Biblical Studies in Reading from this Place Vol 1: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States,” Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995, 117.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 114.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 117.

²¹ Myers, William H. “The Hermeneutical Dilemma of an African American Biblical Student” in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation*, Cain Hope Felder, ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991, 47.

²² Kwok Pui-Lan, “Racism and Ethnocentrism in Feminist Biblical Interpretation” in *Searching the Scriptures Volume One: A Feminist Introduction*. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ed., New York: Crossroad, 1993, 103.

all purposes serve the good of the community.²³ Davies says “postcolonial criticism has focused attention on an uncomfortable truth, namely that the bible is both a problem and a solution.”²⁴ This will be relevant when considering who is missing—even from a text that seems liberative and supportive of people in need. David Buttrick in “Preaching, Hermeneutics, and Liberation,” argues that an educated clergy cannot be the primary interpreters of biblical texts. He says that “[i]t is precisely the poverty of early Christianity that calls into question the hermeneutics of a status clergy.”²⁵ For him the interpretation belongs within the lay readers. For Buttrick it is an important component of liberation to avoid turning the bible into a lesson in personal piety; it must “be interpreted in solidarity with victims” and in light of God’s social promise of a new world order.²⁶ There must be intentionality in engaging biblical interpretation. Together these theologians argue that biblical interpretations used to guide the lives of ordinary people, must include those same people’s interpretations of the texts. Cultural studies uses critical reflection developed from the text, from the author, and from the historical culture, but adds a place for the present day reader, those with and without education and authority, to speak. Cultural studies recognizes that readers are not neutral or removed from their interpretations. “Real readers” for Segovia are all present day readers, including people who are academically trained, informed, or casual, and those who are part of a base community or marginalized group.

I am using cultural studies for this project although for a more robust incorporation of Segovia’s ideas I would have engaged in bible study with volunteers, with and without food

²³ Eryl W. Davies, *Biblical Criticism A Guide for the Perplexed*, New York: Bloomsbury, 2013, 97.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 104.

²⁵ Buttrick, David G., “Preaching, Hermeneutics, and Liberation.” in *Standing with the Poor: Theological Reflections on Economic Reality*, Paul Plenge Parker, ed. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1992, 100.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 102.

security, to contribute their interpretations of these texts. I did not do that, but I will add the voices I have heard from people with few material resources to the reflections of the texts in question. I have engaged in bible study with people living with few material resources for seven years in my work at Worcester Fellowship. While I will be sharing the voices of people who are living with poverty, I am not poor. I am a food secure, white, upper middle class homeowner, with extensive theological education, even as I aim to hear and share the views of people who have few resources, and often, little formal education. While I will share what I have heard from people who are food insecure, because this project did not include a systematic study to gather their voices around these biblical texts it is still my filters that drive the interpretation of these texts. As Segovia and others have noted, my filter is biased in ways I may not recognize. My approach, a reading *with* the people informed by the assumptions of cultural studies, will look briefly at the historical, literary, and cultural worlds of the chosen texts and then offer a theological interpretation of what readers engaged in food ministries, both food secure and insecure, find in these biblical texts.

Matthew 25:31-46

Leaders of direct service charity appeal to Matthew 25:31-46 more than any other scripture passage. It tells of a king judging people solely on their past behavior: did they provide food, drink, or clothing to those who had none? Did they welcome the stranger, care for the sick, or visit those in prison? Both those who will pass (the sheep) and those who will fail (the goats) are surprised to learn that the Son of Man/king/Christ²⁷ was the recipient of their action (or lack

²⁷ The text uses Son of Man, King, and Lord to describe the judge in this story. The scholars I engage use these words plus Christ, Jesus, and Judge. I have used the language of the scholar in each section, but use Christ when speaking about the present day and Jesus (or Matthew) as the person telling the story. This is not a challenge addressed in the scholarship I found, and it does not change to my analysis.

thereof). In other words, the only test was whether they did, or did not show hospitality to the Son of Man in need.

³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³ and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴ Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world,’ ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ ⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ ⁴¹ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; ⁴² for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ ⁴⁴ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ ⁴⁵ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (Matt 25:31-46, NRSV).

Critical biblical scholarship focuses on figuring out who are “the least of these” being helped and who are “the nations” gathered. Missing is any discussion of the people who are in need. Are they among the nations? On what basis will they be judged? A few scholars address what it means to the servers of Christ when the people on the receiving end have Christ within them, or actually are Christ. The answers to these questions will guide direct service food ministries to make time to sit, eat, and share together, and to make space for people who need material resources to be the sheep, that is to serve others who are in need.

According to Eugene Boring in the *New Interpreter's Bible*, Matthew is written between 80-100 CE²⁸ for a specific city-based, Jesus-following, congregation.²⁹ The story of gospel was intended to instruct the community on their faith, providing pastoral care and encouragement.³⁰ While in the story Jesus is speaking to the disciples, the historical reconstruction of Matthew makes it clear that Jesus is speaking to Matthew's congregation as well.³¹ Similarly, while the text is about the care of people in need now, its apocalyptic language is central to story,³² communicating that Christ is present now, in people who need help, yet is coming again for the judgment.³³ Dan O. Via in "Ethical Responsibility and Human Wholeness in Matthew 25:31-46"³⁴ notes that Matthew's eschatology requires each person to act correctly now, because the timing of the judgment is uncertain and yet imminent.³⁴ Matthew 25:31-46 demonstrates this clearly: inheriting the kingdom requires ethical action in this world in the here and now.³⁵

Matthew 25:31-46 and "the Least of These"

Who are the least of these, and what is their role in this story? The ethical actions in Matthew 25:31-46 are done to "the least of these" (vv. 40, 44) and historically scholarly research has disagreed about the meaning of this phrase. While "the least of these" are certainly hungry,

²⁸ Eugene M. Boring, "Matthew" in *The New Interpreter's Bible Vol VIII* Leander Keck et al, ed. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995, 108.

²⁹ Ibid., 105.

³⁰ Ibid., 100, 457.

³¹ Ibid., 429.

³² Ibid., 455.

³³ Ibid., 457.

³⁴ Dan O. Via, "Ethical Responsibility and Human Wholeness in Matthew 25:31-46" in *Harvard Theological Review* 80:1 (1987) 79-100, 90.

³⁵ Ibid., 90.

thirsty, strangers, naked, sick, and in prison, does the Matthean Jesus intend for this to refer to anyone who has these needs, or only Christians in need? The arguments center around three questions: first, the use of the word brothers (NRSV: “members of my family”), second, the fact that this is a private conversation Jesus is having with the disciples, and third, the fact that both the sheep and the goats do not know that they have interacted with Christ.

Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh in *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* identify the challenge: “brothers” is typically used by Matthew to refer to the Christian family or congregation to whom the gospel is addressed.³⁶ Boring, in the NIB, argues that because “brothers” is dropped in 25:45 “least of these” must be referring to all needy people, not only to the needy within the Christian family.³⁷ Via emphasizes that the people/sheep who gave food were surprised to find they had helped Christ and thus must not have known the person they were helping was affiliated with Christ. From the sheep’s point of view, all they saw at the time was a person in need—without identifying characteristics such as identity as Christian or belief in Christ. The sheep inherited the eternal life by helping all people in need.³⁸

In contrast, Martin Tripole’s “*A Church for the Poor and the World*” is a good example of the argument that “the least of these” only includes those in the Christian community. For Tripole the point of the story is to provide encouragement for struggling Christians. As above, Tripole notes that “brothers” (v. 40c) points to the disciples, not to the crowds. He takes this further to insist Matthew used the word to assure the struggling Matthean community that Jesus

³⁶ Bruce J. Malina, and Richard Rohrbaugh. *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, 151.

³⁷ Boring, “Matthew”, 456.

³⁸ Via, “Ethical Responsibility and Human Wholeness”, 93.

is speaking only to them.³⁹ This means they can be comforted by the fact that “they represent the continuing presence of Jesus in the Gentile world and the possibility of salvation for anyone who would respond to them in their need.”⁴⁰ That is, the Matthean community’s suffering is a test for non-believers. Tripole links this story to Matthew 5:3 where Jesus proclaims blessing on the “poor in spirit,” that it is spiritual, not material, poverty that brings about blessing, and thus the materially rich could be spiritually poor and be included in the kingdom.⁴¹ Tripole here is confusing the story of the sheep and goats, thinking it is those that are “poor” who are saved rather than those who care for the poor. Tripole’s interpretation gives the rich a path to salvation⁴² but misses the point of Matthew 25:31-46 where the test is not poverty or wealth, but care for people in need.

Jürgen Moltmann expands this point by noting the Church must be connected to the poor in order to be connected to Christ. Moltmann’s ecclesiology is discussed in *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*. For him the “coming judge is already hidden in the world—now, in the present—in the least of his brethren—the hungry, the thirsty, the strangers, the naked, the sick and the imprisoned.”⁴³ For Moltmann, the fact that the judged, both the givers and the non-givers, do not know what they are doing contradicts those that argue this is solely about poor and persecuted Christians.⁴⁴ The church cannot exist without linking its mission to “seek the

³⁹ Martin R. Tripole, S.J. “A Church for the poor and the world: At issue with Moltmann’s Ecclesiology” in *Theological Studies*, 42 no 4 Dec 1981, p 645-659, 649.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 648.

⁴¹ Ibid., 652.

⁴² Ibid., 653.

⁴³ Jürgen Moltmann, trans. Margaret Kohl, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A contribution to messianic ecclesiology*, New York: Harper & Row, 1977, 126.

⁴⁴ Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 126.

fellowship of the crucified one in the poor,” not out of ethics, or even love, but because Christ is present.⁴⁵ He argues churches leave Christ “generally outside the door of church and society” and therefore, create two communities of Christ, the insiders who believe, and people living in poverty, whom believers push outside.⁴⁶ Moltmann does not deal with the reality that people living in poverty *includes* believers.

Church-based food ministries are often examples of pushing people outside. Insiders are the volunteers, and people who come to get food are relegated to outsider status. And yet, these food ministries developed out of the insiders’ desire to follow the Matthean command to share food with the least of these. Food ministries would be less toxic if those who are food insecure were invited to be insiders, invited to belong, invited to help. Malina and Rohrbaugh note that Matthew 25:31-46 is an insider/outsider story⁴⁷ which is a basic social distinction in the first century, separating family and friends from strangers.⁴⁸ Courtesy and hospitality are required within the in-group and rarely provided for the out-group.⁴⁹ And yet in this story, both the sheep and goats are surprised to find that they are judged based not on what they did for insiders, those they knew, but rather for their care for the needs of outsiders, those they did not know and did not recognize as Christ. Thus the story is a reversal of the insider/outsider ethic, calling on people to care for those that are outsiders.⁵⁰ Direct service food ministries, and shared ministries, are called to serve “the least of these”—everyone who is hungry.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 127.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 129.

⁴⁷ Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 151.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 88.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 151.

Matthew 25:31-46 and “the Nations”

Are the “least of these” judged also? Are they among “the nations”? Scholars make two different arguments concerning identifying who is included in “the nations” (*ethnē*, v. 32a): that the nations are everyone, or the nations are only non-believers. Neither viewpoint accounts for whether the “least of these” are included in the judgment. According to Via, “the nations” must include the church because the discourse is presented as a private conversation directed to the disciples and therefore to the Matthean congregation.⁵¹ While he recognizes Matthew’s uses “the nations” most typically to mean only Gentiles (that is, not disciples and not Jews),⁵² the judged nations are surprised to learn that they helped (or did not help) Christ when they helped (or ignored) “the least of these.” Via’s conclusion, based on the judged people’s surprise, is that “the nations” must include people who are not part of the church, nor evangelized by the church.⁵³ Therefore, the nations consist of everyone. In the *NIB*, Boring comes to the same conclusion—this is a scene of universal judgment.⁵⁴ If everyone is judged based on their willingness to serve people who are hungry, thirsty, or in need of welcome, clothing, healing, and visits in prison, what does this suggest about how the materially poor fit into this story?

Are the materially poor only present in the story so they can be served? Does the story intend to communicate that only people who have enough to give some away are being judged? One possible response is that people in need will not face judgment at all—that “the nations” really means “those among the nations that have excess of material resources, time, and energy.” The text also could be perpetuating the otherness of people in need—when all the nations are

⁵¹ Via, “Ethical Responsibility and Human Wholeness”, 90.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 91.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁵⁴ Boring, “Matthew”, 456.

gathered, the people who need material resources, healing, and release from prison are not present, except as a test case for people with enough. As noted above, Davies warns that the bible does not necessarily offer liberative meaning.⁵⁵ Scholars could spiritualize the text, similarly to Tripole's analysis above, and make the question "when did we give you food?" a metaphorical rather than literal reference. In this way, it can be argued that everyone hungers for something, and this story is not actually about caring for people who need material resources. While it is true that everyone has needs (and certainly "sick" and "in prison" cover a large set of problems regardless of material poverty) it is a stretch to suggest a spiritual reading of this text. The text is about material poverty, illness, strangers, and prison. Matthew says all people will be judged by the way they respond to people in need.

Jacquelyn Grant addresses the challenge of romanticizing poverty in her discussion of the racialization and feminization of poverty in "Poverty, Womanist Theology, and the Ministry of the Church." She tells the story of a white male theologian interpreting a Jeremiah text to show that "the poor are a gift to the middle class," to which she replies if it is such a privilege to be poor, then surely Christians need "a theology of trading places with the poor."⁵⁶ Grant suggests that such romanticizing of poverty is actually guilt reduction theology.⁵⁷ Similarly, I am arguing that reading Matthew 25:31-46 as giving people who are poor a pass on the judgment, even if arguing they automatically secure eternal life, is to declare that people with few material resources are fundamentally different from people with material resources. Grant argues that Christians must give up theologies that oppress others, and "must relinquish their theologies of

⁵⁵ Davies, *Biblical Criticism*, 104.

⁵⁶ Jacquelyn Grant, "Poverty, Womanist Theology, and the Ministry of the Church" in *Standing with the Poor: Theological Reflections on Economic Reality*, Paul Plenge Parker, ed. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1992, 57.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

charity where the poor are given enough to lessen the guilt of the middle class but not enough to strengthen themselves for the long fight against the culture of poverty.”⁵⁸ Reading this text as if people living with poverty are not among “the nations” supports the idea that people living with poverty are less than those with material resources.

In my experience of reading the bible with people who have no homes, people who have food insecurity, people living without material resources, they do not accept that they are missing from this text. Instead, they see the importance of providing help for others in need. That is, people who do not have enough for themselves see this as instruction to find ways to meet the needs of others. In my experience, people in material poverty feel the call to serve food and drink in the same way that people with enough material resources feel that need. They recognize that the sheep/saved are the givers and not the receivers. For people with very little, this is not about giving things away out of their excess, it is not about simplifying their lives, it is not about caring for others who are worse off than they are. Rather, people with need see this text as a simple command from Christ that Christ is in those in need, and that Christ is asking each of person to aid other people in need. Without concerns about dependence, whether the need is short or long term, or whether they feel self-righteous for giving, they recognize the test is only whether a person has given food, drink, clothing, welcomed a stranger, cared for a sick person or visited a person in prison. As such, all people, all the nations, people with and without faith in Jesus, people with and without material resources, need the opportunity to serve others. The most important gift food ministries can offer is a place for everyone to have a turn to serve those who are hungry, a chance to serve Christ.

⁵⁸ Grant, “Poverty, Womanist Theology, and the Ministry of the Church”, 58.

Matthew 25:31-46 and “You did it to Me”

Do volunteers recognize Christ in the people they serve at church-based food ministries? Who are the ministries feeding? What does it mean when the king says “you did it to me” (v. 40d, 45e)? What does it mean that giving food and drink and clothes is something done for or *to* Christ? Via notes that the Son of Man makes himself *identical* to those who are subject to the threats of human existence: exposure, danger, and suffering.⁵⁹ The Son of Man is not merely among people in need, “in some way he *is* they,” and thus he is “identical with the poor and imprisoned.”⁶⁰ Via is arguing that the Son of Man understands what poverty feels like, not only because he has been in that situation when he was among us, but also that he actually *is* living in poverty today. As noted above, Moltmann also emphasizes the presence of Christ *in* the least of these.⁶¹ In fact, going further back into tradition, John Chrysostom, in the fourth century, wrote many sermons on rich people’s Christian responsibility to care for people who are poor. Rudolf Brandle explores Chrysostom’s sermons in “This Sweetest Passage Matthew 25:31-46” where Brandle argues that the text was the central organizing force of all of Chrysostom’s theology.⁶² Chrysostom insists that the body of Christ is present in the poor; therefore, salvation is not a one-time event, it happens over and over again as people interact with Christ *as* the poor.⁶³ Brandle remarks that people have opportunities to interact with Christ constantly, each time they engage

⁵⁹ Via, “Ethical Responsibility and Human Wholeness”, 94.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 127.

⁶² Rudolf Brandle, tr. Dan Holder “This sweetest passage Matthew 25:31-46 and assistance to the poor in the homilies of John Chrysostom” in *Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society*, Susan Holman, Ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008, 136.

⁶³ Ibid., 137.

beggars and people who are destitute.⁶⁴ Indeed, when Christ says, “the poor will always be with you” (Mk 14:7), Chrysostom argues Christ means that *he* will be always present because he is in the poor.⁶⁵ For Via, Moltmann, and Chrysostom, to know Christ is to get to know people who are hungry, thirsty, or in need of welcome, clothing, and visits; to get to know them as people who have much to offer, perhaps more than the material gifts that people with enough can give.

In food ministries people who serve others can develop what Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert call a “God Complex”—a feeling that because they can help others they are more like God than those who need the food. In relationship to the story of the “sheep and the goats,” the act of serving people who are hungry, as Jesus has clearly commanded, makes servers think that they are acting like Jesus. That is, it is common to think of Jesus at the head of the table, serving those who are hungry. This is the opposite of Matthew 25 where the Matthean Jesus says he was *served*. Andrew McGowan, in his article “The Hungry Jesus,” argues that Jesus was more often the guest than the host at the meals described in the bible:

Jesus was most clearly someone willing to eat with diverse company, less an inclusive host than an indiscriminating guest. Jesus appears as host only in quite different and more historically contentious material, relative to that where he is depicted as keeping bad company or being a wine-biber. The “guest” traditions about him are generally defensible; the “host” traditions tend to be more influenced by later reflection than material that scholars in general would actually attribute to the historical Jesus”.⁶⁶

Jesus eating with others is the message, not Jesus serving others. It makes sense that Jesus would engage in the social interaction that is part of the culture of meals in the first century especially

⁶⁴ Brandle, “This sweetest passage...”, 133.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁶⁶ Andrew McGowan, “The Hungry Jesus,” *Biblical History Daily*, Biblical Archeology Society, 03/18/2015. Accessed February 24, 2016. <http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-topics/bible-interpretation/the-hungry-jesus/>

in his role as an itinerant preacher.⁶⁷ Without access to his own resources, McGowan suggests it is Jesus' hunger that makes him open to interesting and diverse table fellowship. In this context it is easy to recognize that Jesus would see himself in the people who are hungry in Matthew 25, as he became hungry on his journeys.⁶⁸ McGowan suggests that it is not serving food that imitates Jesus, but rather eating with others. He is implying reciprocity in the stories of Jesus' eating.

This notion of reciprocity is elaborated by Alicia Vargas in "Who Ministers to Whom: Matthew 25:31-46 and Prison Ministry." She has an interesting notion of reciprocity: someone with resources ministers to someone in need, and in return Jesus ministers to the person with resources. She states: "[A]s we minister to Jesus' own suffering incarnated and imprisoned, *we also will be ministered to by Jesus himself.*"⁶⁹ People engaged in direct service can see God's grace in the glimmers of hope, and in people's deep stories that are found in the ministry.⁷⁰ Vargas does not use this precise language, but I see her as describing a three way relationship between a giver, the poor, and Jesus—the giver gives to the poor, the poor are Jesus, Jesus gives to the giver—which unintentionally removes the poor from having a direct impact on the giver. I believe it is important to keep this reciprocity more balanced: when someone cares for people in need, people in need care for them. In caring for Jesus in the poor, Jesus in the poor cares for the giver. Further, in the effort to look for Jesus in the poor and in the effort to let the poor/Jesus care for them, people with material resources begin to recognize the richness of people who need resources. Jesus-in-the-poor opens people's eyes to perceive the world as it is. Vargas similarly

⁶⁷ McGowan, "The Hungry Jesus."

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Alicia Vargas, "Who Ministers to Whom: Matthew 25:31-46 and Prison Ministry," in *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* Vol 52 No. 2 Summer 2013 June pp. 128-137, 135 *italics original.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

focuses on the necessity of seeing. It takes noticing needs before someone can attend to that need, and it takes overcoming fear, misconceptions, and ignorance to be able to see.⁷¹

As noted in Chapter Two, the stereotyping makes it more difficult for people, Christians included, to see people with few material resources as Christ. As modern readers of the text, these stereotypes contribute to the need to interpret “the least of these” to mean Christians in need, not just anyone in need. It is certainly uncomfortable to imagine that Christ is in the violent alcoholic, the prostitute, the person with delusions, the sex offender, and the murderer. It is more comfortable to think of these people as other, certainly not as Christ. Reading the bible *with* sex offenders, felons, addicts, and people struggling with mental health challenges can break down that barrier. Reading the bible *with* people who have few material resources provides a new way to *see* Christ in “the least of these”. Ministries that engage fully with people who need material resources make it possible to see Christ in people in need. Once a person recognizes Christ, they recognize also that the person in need is worth listening to because Christ surely has something to teach us. The person is able to be a volunteer because Christ surely has some gifts to offer to the program. The person who needs food is able to be an equal participant in ministry because having Christ’s help, and Christ’s presence, improves the ministry. Eating and serving together builds the reciprocity that Jesus modeled. Food ministries based on the Matthew 25:31-46 need to be food ministries where the people who are serving the food get to know the people who need the food. For a Christian ministry to reach out to Christ but then not to engage with Christ is to fail the test of the judgment scene.

⁷¹ Vargas, “Who Ministers to Whom”, 133.

Matthew 25:31-46 and Knowing the Standard for Judgment

At the judgment in Matthew 25:31-46, those who are judged, both those who have served and those who have not, are shocked by the verdict. They did not know that those they served and those they rejected were Christ. Via reminds present-day readers that they are not participants in the text: readers are in on the unanticipated discovery that judgment is contingent on service and that Christ is present in the people served.⁷² When engaging in direct service charity, it is important to remember that the people in the story were not calculating the benefit with an eye to the judgment, but only the benefit for the people in need.⁷³ Via notices that the goats/people who did not serve the Son of Man may have believed in Christ but failed to see that following Christ requires serving the poor, or they may have failed to notice people living with poverty.⁷⁴ Via notes the ethical responsibility for Christians not only to *see* but also to *perceive* people who live in poverty.⁷⁵ Not seeing is not an excuse for the goats (those who did not serve); the judge still holds them responsible for failing to feed people who are hungry.

Matthew 25:31-46 Implications for Shared Ministry

Christians cannot plead, “I did not know” that people with food insecurity need food. Once they have read Matthew 25:31-46 they cannot claim they do not know Christ is in people who are hungry. This text is a clear call to provide for people who need material resources. It seems likely that Matthew’s Jesus intended to include everyone in “the nations” therefore people who are hungry, thirsty, who need welcome, clothing, healing, and visits are included as being able and required to provide services toward others. If serving people who lack material

⁷² Via, “Ethical Responsibility and Human Wholeness”, 97.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

resources is the same as serving Christ then it seems clear that people who are poor are not only identified with suffering but also with Christ's giftedness. This should lead to churches wanting to know more about the stories the poor share, and the gifts Christ gives. Further, McGowan has pointed out that Jesus engaged in food ministries both by attending them and by hosting them, thus food ministries need not be only those with material resources providing food for those without; the command is to engage together in reciprocal ministry. Although present day readers have been warned of Christ's presence, ministries may be surprised to discover the gifts and skills that come with expanding the pool of volunteers.

Acts 6:1-7

The theme of serving others in the context of the early church is also found in Acts 6:1-7. The Christian community was engaging in food ministries where Christians who had little, and Christians who had enough, were working together to create, serve, and cleanup for meals programs on a regular basis. It is a story of early church food ministry at its best, and at its worst. As the church is adding more and more followers, a group of widows have been neglected: perhaps they have not received a charitable handout, perhaps they were passed over in the schedule for serving. The whole church is gathered to address this challenge. New leadership is recognized and in response, the church continues to grow.

Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. ² And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. ³ Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, ⁴ while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word." ⁵ What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. ⁶ They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. ⁷ The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in

Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.
(Acts 6:1-7 NRSV)⁷⁶

Traditional scholarship identifies this as a transition story; intended only to introduce Stephen and other new leaders in the church.⁷⁷ Bruce Malina and John Pilch in *Social Science Commentary on the Book of Acts* emphasize that the text ends with seven new leaders with Hellenistic names, starting with Stephen, who is critical to the following story in Acts 6:8-15 when he is arrested.⁷⁸ When Acts 6:1-7 is understood as a transition story, the widows only function is introducing the seven new leaders and carrying the story of this new Christian community forward toward growth. Selecting men for leadership is then the point of the story. Generally scholarship suggests that the Hellenistic widows were neglected due to cultural differences and disagreements between the “civilized” Hellenists and the “barbarian” Hebrews.⁷⁹ For Malina and Pilch, while the Hebrews are country folk, they are the insiders of the Jerusalem community, and focused on Judean customs, while the Hellenists have returned from the Jewish Diaspora and would have adopted Greek customs and language which would have been perceived as more civilized, and included sophisticated customs around common meals.⁸⁰ For scholars accepting that the cultural conflict is relevant, there are three different approaches to interpreting that conflict. These will be explored below, first, feminist readings engage the

⁷⁶ While traditionally this text goes through verse 6, both Kim and Gonzalez, below, include verse 7, which describes the continued growth of the community. Therefore I have included v. 7.

⁷⁷ I have not included the related arguments made by some scholars that this story must not be about widows at all but about an underlying dispute between the Hellenists and Hebrews. Recent scholars, including Wall and Finger, show those arguments are unsupported, but those arguments do not add to, or take from, my arguments about food ministries.

⁷⁸ Bruce Malina and John J. Pilch, *Social Science Commentary on the Book of Acts*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008, 56.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 56.

widows themselves and wonder if widow necessarily means poor. Second, post-colonial scholarship stresses the interaction of the two cultures. Third, socio-historical studies focus on the story setting at the shared meals in the early church.

Before addressing the new approaches, some basics from the traditional interpretations: according to Robert Wall in the commentary “The Acts of the Apostles” in the *New Interpreter’s Bible*, Acts, written by the same anonymous author as the Gospel of Luke,⁸¹ aims to consolidate the diverse membership of the church⁸² and to help believers join this community that shares everything in common.⁸³ Acts 6 continues the value of sharing material belongings from Acts 2:42-44⁸⁴ but addresses conflict arising out of the sharing: the widows have been neglected.⁸⁵ Wall notes that the Greek *diakonia*, is interpreted as “distribution” when referring to widows (6:1b), but as “ministry” when referring to the apostles in 6:4 (NRSV “serving”).⁸⁶ While Wall notices the dichotomy, he accepts the reading that the widows have been overlooked in the distribution of charitable handouts⁸⁷ and thus the solution is to do a better job of caring for the widows who cannot care for themselves. He finds good news in the solidarity between the men in their decision to improve the efficiency of the handouts.⁸⁸ Wall defends the apostles unwillingness to help out themselves by noting that the existing leaders cannot “preach and do

⁸¹ Robert W. Wall, “The Acts of the Apostles: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible Vol X*, Leander Keck et al, ed. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002, 5.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, note 244, p111.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 114.

bookkeeping at the same time,”⁸⁹ although it is hard to see how the criteria in Acts 6:3 (“men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom”) could point to bookkeeping. Wall’s argument is that here the requirements point to the Greek ideal of choosing leaders based on character rather than skills.⁹⁰ It seems to me that these are requirements for leadership more than keeping books, and at least some of the seven do go on to be church leaders, more than managers of a meals program. The traditional reading presumes that widows are poor, unable to care for themselves, and are asking for fair distribution of handouts, but this, I shall argue, is not the point of the story. I read Acts 6:1-7 as a story that calls attention to common meals themselves as a place for shared service, each person eating with, and serving, the other.

Acts 6:1-7 is About Widows

There are interpretations that insist that this is a story about widows. Gail R. O’Day in *The Women’s Bible Commentary* focuses on the failure of the community to name women as leaders in to solve the widow’s complaint. She notes that the women Paul meets in Greece are identified as leaders in their communities, so the Hellenistic widows may be of high standing,⁹¹ and could have been assigned the leadership roles in resolving the conflict. O’Day accepts that the story is about almsgiving, but notes that Luke is reinforcing the concept that table ministry, while assigned to men, is still identified as less important than the preaching ministry of the twelve.⁹² She notes that the value of the widows is further downplayed in Acts 9:36-43, when by

⁸⁹ Wall, “The Acts of the Apostles”, 115.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Gail R. O’Day “Acts” in *The Women’s Bible Commentary*, ed C.A. Newsom and S. H. Ringe; Louisville: Westminster John Knox 1992, 396.

⁹² Ibid., 397.

identifying the widow Tabitha with good works (rather than *ministry* of word or table), while in Acts 6, the men assigned to assist widows are engaging in ministry.⁹³

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, on the other hand, is certain that this is an argument over the Eucharist. She uses her book *In Memory of Her* to explore the biblical language around service and finds that “serving at table,” found also in Acts 16:34, Luke 10:40, 12:37 and 17:8, is not giving away money but is table service at a meal. “Most likely the Eucharistic ministry” and includes all the prep, serving during the meal, and clean up, which Acts 2:46 notes was happening every day.⁹⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza argues that to be overlooked, the widows “were not assigned their turn in table service or they were not properly served.”⁹⁵ She notes it is likely Hellenistic women would have expected to be included in “breaking of bread” while the Hebrews may not have allowed it.⁹⁶ The solution of assigning the twelve to do the *diakonia* of the word, and the seven to do the *diakonia* of the table⁹⁷ reinforces the Gospel of Luke’s Martha/Mary story where *diakonia* of the table is also the lesser ministry.⁹⁸

Once the conflict may be about *servicing* rather than eating, it becomes clear that the widows who feel neglected may not be poor. Schüssler Fiorenza notes that the text does not say either way.⁹⁹ Certainly women involved in this new church movement were not all poor, for example Mary, mother of John Mark, who was cousin to Barnabas (Col 4:10) is likely in charge

⁹³ O’Day “Acts”, 399.

⁹⁴ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her A Feminist Theological Reconstructions of Christian Origins*, Tenth Anniversary Edition, New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994, 165.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

of a Hellenistic house church in Jerusalem.¹⁰⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza's argument is that Mary would not be named if John Mark's leadership was important, and she wonders if Mary is one of the dissatisfied widows in the story. Thus this is a story about identifying the importance of table service, not about charitable giving, and the widows' complaint is about not getting a turn in the service rotation, even if some of them also are given charitable resources.

Scott F. Spencer in "Neglected Widows" notes that it seems to be hard for scholars to stay focused on the widows themselves,¹⁰¹ similar to food ministries where it seems to be hard to stay focused on the people in need. Spencer traces the widows throughout Luke-Acts, starting with Anna in the birth narrative (Luke 2:36-38), the widows at Nain and of Zarephath (Luke 7:11-17 and 4:25-25), the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8), the poor widow (Luke 21:1-4, 20:27-40, 45-47), the neglected Hellenistic widows (Acts 6:1-7), and ending with Acts 9:36-43 and the supported widows at Joppa.¹⁰² "These scenes featuring four *individual* widows accumulate over the course of the gospel to constitute a *group* of Lucan widows in the reader's mind."¹⁰³ He notes that while widows certainly are women whose husbands have died, biblical studies generally assume they are all also destitute and unappreciated, which fails to recognize the biblical widows who do not fit that understanding.¹⁰⁴ Still Spencer notes that Hellenistic widows, by virtue of being far from home, are cut off from family support.¹⁰⁵ He disagrees with Malina and Pilch that

¹⁰⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 166.

¹⁰¹ Scott F. Spencer, "Neglected Widows in Acts 6:1-7" in *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 56, no 4 Oct 1994, 715-733. p. 718.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 719, *italics original*.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 720.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 728.

the story is neatly resolved or a sign of solidarity, noting the apostles are more concerned with being distractions from preaching than with members being ignored, and they refuse to be part of the solution.¹⁰⁶ Spencer argues the apostles fail the test to act as Jesus would act¹⁰⁷ by failing to make caring for one another a top priority. They have failed to provide food for the hungry, and even when they *do* act it is carefully orchestrated to not interfere with the apostles apparently more important work. The feminist readings of O'Day, Schüssler Fiorenza, and Spencer show how difficult it is to keep the focus of this text on the widows, either as people who are hungry or people who want the opportunity to serve others. Stereotypes of widows as destitute, and of people without material resources as unable to engage in ministry, interfere with the critical readings of this text. It is important to keep the widows as central, active agents in the text.

Acts 6:1-7 is About Cultural Conflict

The widows are bringing attention to a cultural conflict in the community. The story is not just about providing food for another person; it is about caring for someone from another culture. Hansung Kim in “Rereading Acts 6:1-7” and Justo L. González in “Reading from my bicultural place: Acts 6:1-7” focus their interpretations on the cultural clash between the Hebrew leadership and the Hellenists. Kim suggests this story is the church’s first struggle with intercultural conflict.¹⁰⁸ He notes that biblical scholars are thinking of the administrative issues, while mission scholars focus on a cultural and political conflict.¹⁰⁹ González identifies his Cuban

¹⁰⁶ Spencer, “Neglected Widows in Acts 6:1-7”, 729.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 730.

¹⁰⁸ Hansung Kim, “Rereading Acts 6:1-7: Lessons for Multicultural Mission Organizations,” in *Evangelical Mission Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (January 2009) 57.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 58.

heritage, and Spanish accent, as fundamental to his understanding of this scripture¹¹⁰ and focuses on the power differential between the two cultures.¹¹¹

From a cultural standpoint, Kim notes the Hellenists and Hebrews, eating together in Jerusalem, may have had different rituals and the Hellenists may have been denied table fellowship because of that.¹¹² While the Hebrews would know Greek, the language of the empire, the Hellenists would not know Aramaic, the local language.¹¹³ González suggests “[t]he Hellenists are looked upon with suspicion by many of the more orthodox Jews. Their faith and religious practices may not be entirely orthodox.”¹¹⁴ Kim notices “the Hebrews were likely to have greater access to the decision-making process than the Hellenists.”¹¹⁵ The cultural mix is complicated, Hellenists are perhaps the more cosmopolitan, but they are also the outsiders. The insider Hebrews have set up the structures and rules of the Jerusalem community, but are likely not from Jerusalem itself, instead they are country folk from Galilee. The mix results in unequal treatment. In Kim’s experience, Western missionaries, who generally speak the organizational language as a first language, know the decision-making ins and outs and thus design organizations around western cultural sensibilities.¹¹⁶ Similarly González notes that churches often create structures that unintentionally block access for people of different cultures.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁰ Justo L. González, “Readings from my bicultural place: Acts 6:1-7”, in *Reading from this Place Vol 1: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995, 140.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 142.

¹¹² Kim, “Rereading Acts 6:1-7”, 59.

¹¹³ Ibid., 58.

¹¹⁴ González, “Readings from my bicultural place”, 142.

¹¹⁵ Kim, “Rereading Acts 6:1-7”, 60.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ González, “Readings from my bicultural place”, 141.

González points out that the selection of Matthias in Acts 2, with the rule that the new apostle must have known Jesus, limited the twelve to only Hebrews, despite the fact that these Galileans, as outsiders in Jerusalem, may have understood the Hellenist's complaint.¹¹⁸

González is impressed that the early church did not put a token minority into a position of authority, but rather changed the structure of the leadership, with the seven now in charge of all the resources of the growing church, a position that is administrative, and with great authority.¹¹⁹ Still more remarkable, these seven administrators are then filled with the Holy Spirit to become significant preachers of the word.¹²⁰ Kim is equally empowered by the way the story leads members to speak out and encourage making a space for people from other cultures to speak.¹²¹ He notes that this will require people with authority to recognize what they do not know about other cultures and that the right response to grievances is to change the systems.¹²² Reading the text for the modern context, Kim argues that existing western leadership of missionary organizations must recognize and listen to other cultural voices, and make a place for leadership alongside, rather than under, the existing structures.¹²³ Sadly, Kim fails to address the gender disparity by appointing men to care for the widows, rather than widows to care for the widows. When read as a story of cultural clash, Acts 6:1-7 suggests that people who have been neglected must be part of the solution, not simply allocated an equal share of the resources, but also encouraged to be included in the leadership. Similarly, for shared food ministry Acts 6:1-7 offers

¹¹⁸ González, "Readings from my bicultural place", 143.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 144.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 145.

¹²¹ Kim, "Rereading Acts 6:1-7", 61.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid., 62.

the recommendation to move people who lack cultural power, that is, those who are food insecure, into leadership roles. The postcolonial perspective presented by Kim and González portray Acts 6:1-7 as a text that points to power differentials between cultures, and the importance of making space for people in the minority to use their voices in leadership.

Acts 6:1-7 is About Sharing Food

Acts 6:1-7 points to the early church sharing food with one another. In the early church, many of the members were what today is called food insecure. In *Ancient Christian Worship* Andrew McGowan suggests that the earliest worship practices were centered on shared meals as described in the communal sharing in Acts 2 and the shared table service in Acts 6. While the word “worship” makes modern readers think of specific rituals, the earliest meaning was “obedience and service” rather than ritual.¹²⁴ Eucharist, or thanksgiving, for the earliest Christians was “both the whole of their life and a meal of bread and wine.”¹²⁵ Early Christians met regularly for meals—it was not a social add-on to worship, “but the regular form of Christian gathering.”¹²⁶ These banquets, formal events separate from ordinary meals, included bread breaking and wine, reading, prayer, and speaking. Early Christians organized their lives around them.¹²⁷ Bread and wine (or water) were the staple meals for even the poorest people.¹²⁸ While the meal was followed by a symposium, or discourse,¹²⁹ the evidence suggests that in the

¹²⁴ Andrew B. McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship Early Church Practices in Social, Historical and Theological Perspective*, Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Academic, 2014, 3.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

earliest time the focus was on eating.¹³⁰ It was not until the third century that the community was too large to have extended meals together and began to distribute only small pieces of bread.¹³¹

Reta Halteman Finger in *Of Widows and Meals* explores those extended, daily, common meals in the early church, described in Acts 2:41-47, and the cause of the controversy in Acts 6:1-7. Noting that most western (mostly white, mostly male) theologians cannot fathom a sharing economy, she begins her analysis of Acts 6:1-7 with the understanding that in Acts 2:42 the community is engaging in constant, perhaps daily, sharing of teaching, eating, and praying together.¹³² While there is argument as to whether they are sharing Eucharist or just dinner, Finger argues that all meals in first century Palestinian culture are symbolic and carry deep meaning and the additional detail of eating across different social positions makes the symbolism extraordinary.¹³³ The word “believers,” rather than “friends,” in 2:44 makes it clear to Finger that the community is sharing goods across class barriers;¹³⁴ they are creating a single identity despite expected in-group/out-group designations. Finger sees this as a continuation of the common purse held by the disciples in Luke.¹³⁵ Finger notes that organized Jewish almsgiving does not begin until after the writing of Acts, so it cannot be what is referenced in this story.¹³⁶ These meals were not examples of people with plenty giving things or money to people with little, but rather the new community identifying as the family of God, a fictive kin group owning things in

¹³⁰ McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship*, 38.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹³² Finger, Reta Halteman. *Of Widows and Meals: Communal Meals in the Book of Acts*. Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishers, 2007, 225.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 230.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 232.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 231.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 235.

common as a family does.¹³⁷ Using research on housing in first century Palestine, Finger says the regular meals could consist of several families sharing a courtyard, and would include people who do not have homes as well as out of town believers.¹³⁸ Finger suggests that as more and more disciples joined the community, the Acts 6:1-7 story is about the growth surpassing the organizational capacities of the new faith family.¹³⁹ She claims it is a middle class mindset that makes scholars see almsgiving as something that is separate from eating together across class boundaries. Finger notes that modern interpreters see *diakonia* as diaconal service to the poor.¹⁴⁰ However, since nearly all the new converts to the community would have been poor, the challenge is not almsgiving but how to envelop everyone into the existing households.¹⁴¹ Perhaps the Hellenist widows, having come to Jerusalem from away, did not have homes to manage and so expected to be the organizers for the community meals. Finger notes that in a community with a shared economy there are no “needy” to receive alms—the community meals provide for everyone. While widows might be poorer, other Christian writings actually include widows in a variety of contexts: models for Christian living, providers for the community, as well as destitute.¹⁴² I would add that whether or not the widows are poorer than the others they still can help to serve the meal and will still feel left out if they are not included in the rotation of serving. Finger agrees with Schüssler Fiorenza that the leadership’s focus on preaching over table service

¹³⁷ Finger, *Of Widows and Meals*, 236.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 238.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 252.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 256.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 259.

mirror's Luke's handling of Mary and Martha.¹⁴³ But she sees the apostles' willingness to call together the whole community as supporting the importance of the daily common meals to the life of the new congregation.¹⁴⁴ Because women are traditionally the keepers of meals, Finger sees boundary breaking in the appointment of men to oversee the common meal, which contributes to the model of Christian leaders as servants.¹⁴⁵

Finger's goal is to promote commensality—sharing resources by eating together. “Because the church as a whole has not linked its sacred meal with the need for Christians of all social classes and ethnic backgrounds to come together around food, we are geographically separated from each other more than ever.”¹⁴⁶ The most authentic recreation of the Lord's Supper for Finger is the community meal and soup kitchen¹⁴⁷ because of their ability to cross class and ethnic boundaries. For Finger, the church-based meals program should be a re-creation of the shared meals in the early church. Everyone eats. Everyone contributes. Everyone belongs. Thus, these socio-historical readings on Acts 6:1-7 stress the importance of sharing food, and work, in the early church.

Acts 6:1-7 Implications for Shared Ministries

The story of the widows informs the creation of shared ministry. According to Acts, in the earliest church people ate together regularly, filled with excitement for the good news. Christians with enough material resources may have trouble comprehending the excitement in the simple pleasure of having enough to eat, and in gathering for a meal as family rather than as

¹⁴³ Finger, *Of Widows and Meals*, 265

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 267.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 269.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 281.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

street beggars, each person taking a turn to serve and a turn to eat. On the streets of Worcester, when we gathered for lunch and then worship, it was not uncommon for people who needed food to ask, not when can I eat, but when can I serve? Many people wanted their turn in the food distribution. Finger's argument that the widows' frustration is not that they are hungry but that they are kept out of the kitchen, serving, and cleanup of the meal rings true to my experiences in food ministry. Although scholars argue as to whether the widows were poor or not, as I discussed above, Matthew 25:31-46 makes it clear the requirement to be of service is not dependent on a person's wealth. Acts 6:1-7 is logically about a group of widows, speaking a minority language, complaining that they want to be included in the opportunities to serve.

This text reminds Christians to avoid dismissing the story of sharing resources in Acts 2 by arguing that it is too difficult. Problems in sharing arose for the early church, and their response was to call the community together and look for new leadership. Although I wish that some of the widows were chosen to lead, the community did allow for the minority voices in leadership. Today, one strategy Christians can engage to share resources is to develop shared food ministries. To avoid the problem of the frustrated widows, these ministries must include the people who are food insecure, and the people who have minority voices, in the leadership of the program. Acts 6:1-7 is a reminder that service is important to everyone.

I cannot leave the story of Acts without noting that in McGowan's view the early Christian shared eating was an act of Eucharist, and, for Finger, it was an act of creating a community of belonging. The common meal included breaking bread and had significance beyond the food. This is relevant for the sanctity of food service ministries. Food ministries are not simply an ethical ministry of giving, they contain the key components of worship, breaking bread and sharing it with the diversity of others. People in the early church ate together because

they *belonged* to one another. They shared food, those with plenty bringing more material goods, and those with little bringing less, because they had become one family. They saw each other as part of the same household of God. This is what food ministries should strive for, a connection between people that would not otherwise interact. The common meal brings forth an image of plenty: each person brings what they can in terms of resources and gifts for service and the result is enough for all to partake together.

Conclusion: Biblical Guidance for Shared Ministries

Both the stories of the sheep and the goats, and the story of the widows are important to the development of shared ministry models. Matthew 25:31-46 is the clearest command to Christians to engage in direct service ministries. Readers are warned that they will be judged based on whether they shared food, drink, clothing, welcome, healing, and visits with people who need them. None of these preclude improving the lives of people who live with material poverty by engaging in community organizing or community development, but the text does preclude Christians from refusing to give food to people who do not have enough. Because the Matthean Jesus makes the point that giving the food to a person who is hungry is giving food to Jesus, direct service ministries must do more than give food, they must be a place to listen to the people who are hungry, and be a place where hungry people can serve others. If people who are poor are included among the sheep and the goats, then people who are poor are responsible to care for the hungry. Meals, pantries, and gardens are opportunities to serve, as well as opportunities to be served. Acts 6:1-7 is the story of a community meal where some people who want a turn to serve have been denied that right. The text is a reminder that food ministries are not only places of meeting the need for material resources, but also places that community is created by eating together, sharing the work together, giving thanks together. Food ministries

cannot let cultural differences and different languages keep separate people from one another, leadership should include all of the parts of the community. That requires creating new structures for food ministries, structures that help those who are minorities, those who are oppressed, those who are not seen as leaders, to belong to the programs. Belonging requires including people in the table service, the preparation, the serving, the cleanup, and eating together.

Chapter Four will use liberation theology to further the argument that people need to eat together in order to know each other across class differences, and that knowing one another includes learning about the systems that create poverty. In addition, liberation theology contributes more depth to the argument that the skills, leadership, service, and the desire to help are widely present and that making space to use those skills leads to an increased sense of belonging.

CHAPTER FOUR: LIBERATION THEOLOGY AND SHARED MINISTRY

As I explored in Chapter Three, Matthew 25:31-46 and Acts 6:1-6 call on Christians to provide food both to meet people's hunger and to create community. Community development programs may increase employment and access to food, but until these programs effect changes to people's access to food there will still be people who need food right away. Since some of the ways food ministries have traditionally operated may be hurting the people they intend to serve, shared ministry aims to change direct service programs. This chapter engages two liberation theologians, Gustavo Gutiérrez and Letty Russell, to further explore the role of church, and Christians, in engaging in shared ministry so that it meets the needs of food insecure people in ways that are helpful, not hurtful.

In 1971, Gustavo Gutiérrez formally advanced the idea that a particular theology of liberation grows out of the lives of people living with poverty in *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*. A Catholic priest in Peru, his work starts with the suggestion that God is especially located among the poor, and that at "the very core of the preferential option for the poor there is an experience of God's gift of love."¹ Because God is found with the poor, Gutiérrez argues that the church is called to work with the poor to protest and to overcome the systems that create material poverty. In *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, Gutiérrez argues that a theology of liberation grows out of people's spiritual encounters with God as they engage with the world. He says it is those spiritual encounters that have created the ideas of liberation in Latin

¹ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003, xix.

America.² Spiritual encounters include material realities; liberation theology takes into account the fact that people need material things, such as shelter, health care, and food.³

Since Gutiérrez's theology begins with people who need material resources, my question of how middle class U.S. churches might engage in direct service food ministries is far from Gutiérrez's mind. In his context, his focus is people living in poverty, and the role the church can play in supporting their call for change. He is adamant that the work of liberation includes revolution, a complete overthrow of the status quo. As such Gutiérrez may seem like the wrong resource to use to discern what are the essential elements for ethical direct service food ministries. Like some in Chapter Two who critique direct service charity, Gutiérrez certainly would argue for churches to be part of changing the systems that create poverty. Most relevant to my work, Gutiérrez's theology provides two essential foundations to ethical direct service ministries, namely, the concepts of solidarity and conscientization. Paulo Freire first used the term *conscientization* to describe people learning to see beyond individual circumstance and to see the systemic causes of oppression and poverty.⁴ Both people with and without material resources need conscientization. Those involved in direct service ministry must be conscientized to the systemic causes of poverty and must develop solidarity—people who are poor with each other and people who have material resources with those who are poor. Solidarity is greater than community building: it includes the willingness to take risks to stand up for one another. Shared ministry provides the opportunity to make space for conscientization and to move people to solidarity.

² Gustavo Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, xix.

³ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁴ Freire, Paulo, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Myra Bergman Ramos, Trans. New York: Herder and Herder, 1970. 19, 95, 101.

Similarly Letty Russell, a U.S. feminist theologian, used feminist theology to create a new ecclesiology, rather than aiming to discuss direct service ministry. She builds on the work of liberation theologians, including Gutiérrez, to construct a feminist theology with her book *Church in the Round*. She develops a theology of the round table, a theology that is feminist and liberative, in dialogue with tradition and with the experiences of the marginalized, especially women's experiences. She is quite careful about speaking as a white woman and prioritizes the voices of women who are not white. Her theology starts with the various tables of the Christian tradition, certainly the Eucharistic table, but also the kitchen table, the welcome table, and most especially a round table, the roundness emphasizing equality of place. Her idea of equality starts with partnerships across boundaries, an idea she explores in *Household of Freedom*. The posthumously published *Just Hospitality* explores how partnerships require more than a warm welcome, they require making space for belonging and leadership. Her image of how equality can be created around the table of church by sharing the experiences of being both participants and leaders provides the underpinnings for creating solidarity in direct service ministry.⁵

Together Gutiérrez and Russell guide direct service ministries toward starting with solidarity with those in need. For both Gutiérrez and Russell, solidarity is the work of church being church, rather than a mission project, or an evangelism program, somehow added onto the church. Gutiérrez condemns the spiritualization of poverty; he emphasizes that material poverty is not simply unfortunate, it is deadly. And yet he is opposed to community development which treats poverty as *only* economic. For Gutiérrez, the church's mission is conscientizing people to how poverty is abusive and created by imperialism. Russell's table theology is intended to overcome imperialism and domination with a vision of leadership that includes many more

⁵ Letty Russell, *Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church*, Louisville KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993, 31.

voices. It takes away the pre-supposition that direct service ministry should be led only by people who have plenty. To create shared ministry, the program must cultivate the conscientization of volunteers, strong relationships strong that encourage solidarity, a broad view of poverty as not only material, and a new vision of leadership.

Material and Spiritual Poverty

Gutiérrez offers an important critique of Christian language concerning material and spiritual poverty. This is important to this project because some of the critiques of direct service charity in Chapter Two start with a presumption that poverty can be used synonymously with sinfulness. For example Corbett and Fikkert have developed a theory of four different types of poverty, using poverty to identify different ways to be separated from God.⁶ While Corbett and Fikkert's intent is to show that all are equal in sinfulness before God, Gutiérrez is explicit in arguing that this is a dangerous line of reasoning that threatens the very life and culture of those who live with material poverty. For Gutiérrez human equality is found in spiritual poverty. Spiritual poverty is the shared striving to get closer to God; material poverty is singular in the way it benefits those who have material resources and hurts those who do not.

All people are equal in the eyes of Christ, but all people do not have equal access to material resources. Gutiérrez insists that material poverty is incomparable to any other challenge individuals and communities face and to identify other things people lack using the language of poverty is inappropriate. As a Roman Catholic, he is concerned with the way Roman Catholic Religious take vows of poverty as a model of being dependent on God. In his view this makes material poverty appear to be an ideal to achieve, rather than a force of death and desperation.

⁶ Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 61.

Indeed, Christians of many denominations try to focus on simple living, that is living without material excess. Gutiérrez argues that when Christians suggest that austerity and simple living are ideals to strive for, and are similar to material poverty, and they imply material poverty has some benefits.⁷ As described in Chapter Two, many authors are concerned that direct service charity perpetuates ideas that poverty is caused by sinfulness.⁸ Gutiérrez provides a corrective for both of these misunderstandings about poverty. He also identifies scriptural support for spiritual poverty as a concept that unites Christians, and all humans, in their search for God.

Poverty for Gutiérrez is the death of the individual, but also, as a community, it is cultural death, and the death of a culture weighs most heavily on the dispossessed and oppressed.⁹ While Gutiérrez certainly acknowledges the individual challenges of poverty, his theological approach focuses on the collective experience. He notes that “[n]ot having access to certain cultural, social and political values, for example, is today part of the poverty that persons hope to abolish.”¹⁰ Gutiérrez says material poverty causes a widely impoverished life. “Beyond any possible doubt, the life of the poor is one of hunger and exploitation, inadequate health care and lack of suitable housing, difficulty in obtaining an education, inadequate wages and unemployment, struggles for their rights and repression.”¹¹ For Gutiérrez, material poverty is comparable to the biblical concept of exile, people who are poor end up being essentially foreigners, treated as strangers by

⁷ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation, History, Politics, and Salvation*, Sr. Caridad Ina and John Eagleson, Trans., Maryknoll NY: Orbis: 1988, 152.

⁸ Examples: Stivers, *Disrupting Homelessness*, 50, Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 61, Lupton, 101. Blue, *Practical Justice*, loc. 635.

⁹ Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, 10.

¹⁰ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 163.

¹¹ Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, 125.

society and the church.¹² Indeed he argues that when nations and communities accept material poverty as a given, it is a sign that those with plenty have broken off their relationship with those who have little and with the God who sits with them.

Gutiérrez describes poverty as “a scandalous condition inimical to human dignity and therefore contrary to the will of God.”¹³ According to Gutiérrez, biblical language around poverty includes a variety of Hebrew words to describe communities and individuals. For example *ébyôn*, found in the Psalms and prophets, means a beggar who needs resources from someone else, *dal* is used in the prophets, Job, and Proverbs to mean being weak or frail, and the most common word, *ani* describes being bent over, humiliated, and without strength and vigor.¹⁴ In the New Testament, the Greek *ptokós*, or *poor person*, means not only indigent, but wretched and driven to begging.¹⁵ Scriptural descriptions of material poverty suggest that it is not just limiting; it is devastating. These texts all require those who have resources and power to take a stand against poverty. They should not only reject poverty, but also should be indignant at the injustice of the oppressors.¹⁶ Material poverty in the bible is not caused by fate, just a few biblical examples suggest it is caused by the crimes of the nation (Isaiah 10:1-2),¹⁷ by unjust laws (Amos 2:6-7), by fraudulent commerce (Hosea 12:8), hoarding lands (Micah 2:1-3), unjust taxes (Amos 4:1). Unjust systems privilege a few at the expense of the many.¹⁸ In the bible,

¹² Ibid., 11.

¹³ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 165.

¹⁴ Ibid., 165, 252, notes 14-19.

¹⁵ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 165.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 167.

¹⁸ Ibid., 166.

poverty is denounced while putting forth a call for creating more just systems, in rules about farming practices (Deut 24:19-21, Lev 19:9-10), rules about the Sabbath (Exodus 23:12), about giving to the poor (Deut 14:28-29), about interest on loans, jubilee years, freeing slaves, and more.¹⁹ For Gutiérrez, the biblical witness suggests that poverty is caused by injustice, and the biblical response is to give to the poor and fix the injustices.

To understand the importance of Gutiérrez's point, consider Corbett and Fikkert's proposal, touched on in Chapter Two but expanded here, that poverty is *not* only, or even primarily material need. They have identified four types of relationships that can be impoverished: relationships with God, with creation, with neighbors, and with oneself.²⁰ For them, identifying humanity's common sinfulness, as the result of the fall, demonstrates all people have a common poverty, which helps make it clear that people with material resources, and people without, share the experience of poverty.²¹ Corbett and Fikkert identify spiritual poverty, or a broken God relationship, as materialism, greed, lack of faith, and addictions. Spiritual poverty is depending on things other than on God.²² Broken creation relationships are evidenced both by failing to work and being a workaholic. Broken community relationships include self-centeredness and exploitation of others. Low self-esteem and the god complex grow out of impoverished relationships with self.²³ Unfortunately, without further explication of this idea the authors are dangerously close to suggesting that material poverty is therefore sin, similar to the

¹⁹ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 167.

²⁰ Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 61.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 62.

²² *Ibid.*, 61.

²³ *Ibid.*

sins of greed or self-centeredness, which implies that the individual with little has caused their impoverished situation. For Gutiérrez the sin is in those who benefit from the systems of poverty.

While Corbett and Fikkert's goal is to use the fall of humankind and the concept of universal sinfulness to help his evangelical audience recognize their own poverty, and their similarity with those who are poor, Gutiérrez is adamant that this is a misuse of the word "poverty." To use the language of poverty to create ideals for people who have material resources to reduce their spiritual impoverishment by prioritizing simple living is to romanticize poverty. In this case, the word poverty conflates two ideas, the simple living that arises from voluntarily doing without and the involuntary experience of not having enough to get by. Gutiérrez wants to be clear that these are separate things; he insists "poverty means death. It means death due to hunger and sickness."²⁴ Gutiérrez would argue with any claim that people choose material poverty, and death, by their own choices or sins. Corbett and Fikkert are right that all are equal before God, separated from God each in a specific, personal way. I appreciate their naming of materialism, greed, and exploitation. This list of impoverishments, however, allows people with material resources to continue to conflate poverty with sinfulness, to continue to focus on the individual failing of people who are poor, rather than on the systemic causes of material poverty.

The biblical definition of spiritual poverty, as described by Gutiérrez is quite different from that identified by Corbett and Fikkert. For them, spiritual poverty is a focus on things other than God. Gutiérrez shows that spiritual poverty is identified biblically as an ideal, as becoming able to be open to God, humble before God, to welcome God.²⁵ The Hebrew *anaw* is used

²⁴ Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, 9.

²⁵ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 169.

sometimes to describe spiritual poverty. It includes the faithful remnant (for example Is. 4:3), those awaiting the Messiah (Zeph. 3:12-13), those who trust God (Ps. 34:9), fear God (Ps. 25:12-14), are faithful (Ps. 37:28). In the New Testament, blessed are the poor in spirit (Mt. 5:1): “to be totally at the disposition of the Lord.”²⁶

Gutiérrez insists material poverty is a scandal to the gospel and cannot be a “Christian ideal,”²⁷ but spiritual poverty is something to strive for. Gutiérrez emphasizes that spiritual poverty is not about wealth (or austerity) but about having Christ’s approach, to be childlike before God.²⁸ Although it may be about simple living, for Gutiérrez it is not primarily about giving up the goods of the world.²⁹ “Christian poverty has meaning only as a commitment of solidarity with the poor, with those who suffer misery and injustice.”³⁰ Spiritual poverty then may include giving up material wealth, but *only* if done for the purpose of solidarity with the poor. Voluntary poverty is not a benefit to one’s relationship with God unless it is done in order to be with God’s people: those who are poor. Gutiérrez argues that the early Christians shared their resources together, not because it was good to be poor, but because the poor needed a share of the common goods.³¹ This matches my reading of Acts 6:1-7 explored in Chapter Three. Those who had enough were not looking for a simpler lifestyle, they were looking for a way to provide for those in need—thus they were seeking spiritual poverty; that is meekness before God. Entering the world of the poor, as described above, solidarity, requires humility, childlike

²⁶ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 169.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 171.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 170.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 171.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 172.

³¹ *Ibid.*

faith, risk taking. It is difficult, but it is not impossible.³² Gutiérrez argues that achieving spiritual poverty requires accepting one's role as children of God; accepting one's relationship as siblings of all others, as children of God. While one aspect of spiritual poverty is detachment from material goods, for Gutiérrez it is not the most important aspect.³³

All people are striving to find the spiritual poverty that brings them closer to God; some are struggling with material poverty. For people with enough material resources working toward spiritual poverty requires being in solidarity with those with little. Material poverty is not only about economics, and distribution of resources, it is also about who has control of the economy and of the resources. Indeed, it is about who has the right to dream of a better life and has the agency to make that happen. As I will address later in this chapter, developing solidarity requires conscientization of people with material resources, and those without, to these concepts. Church should be the place where people with and without material resources gather together to develop their spiritual poverty.

Mission and Evangelism

For both Russell and Gutiérrez, church is more about a way of being than a set of things to do. Their primary question is not about “doing” mission or mission projects, or evangelism, or outreach. Instead, for both of them, the work of the church is to model, to live out, to *be* the liberation of the people, for that is the work of God. Rich and poor alike are liberated by the church's efforts to create a just society, a new humanity.³⁴ Gutiérrez argues that *being* a church among the poor gives poverty its proper importance.³⁵ Russell argues for *reforming* the church

³² Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, 126.

³³ *Ibid.*, 127.

³⁴ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 105.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 162.

such that it expresses God's hospitality across barriers of difference.³⁶ For both of them the question is not what church does for their neighbors without food, but how can a church live out God's call to their community?

For Letty Russell, the church is not the exclusive mediator of salvation. Rather, to the extent that it is a place that demonstrates Christ's love and release for people living in poverty, it is one of the signs of salvation.³⁷ Russell notes that because God has chosen to be among people living in poverty, the poor are mediators of salvation. She is not arguing that the church, or the poor, have special righteousness, but that both can be a sign of what liberation might look like.³⁸ Salvation is liberation, thus church should look like liberation. Russell does not ask of church "what are the ministries" but rather "what are the structures that promote liberation"? Mission is being connected to the liberation struggles of particular groups of people.³⁹ A church focused on food insecurity then engages in tasks that promote liberating and empowering people living with food insecurity. She would argue that any group that uses its faith in Jesus Christ to share their faith through liturgy, service, and shared struggle for liberation is a church.⁴⁰ Mission is the first requirement, not an extra, optional, of church. The church then is being *church* to the extent that it liberates those it engages. It is good news as long as it demonstrates Christ's liberating power.

Like mission, evangelism is not a project but rather a way of being for the church. In Gutiérrez' environment almost everyone is part of the Catholic church, but he still is interested in how the church can more authentically proclaim the good news by more authentically being the

³⁶ Russell, *Church in the Round*, 158.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 120.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 121.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁴⁰ Russell, *Church in the Round*, 94.

church. This starts, for him, with condemnation of social injustice, of using the church's prophetic voice to make it clear that it is removing itself from supporting the status quo.⁴¹ That is, the church engages in evangelism by making it clear to those who are oppressed that the church is on their side, and it is against the systems that oppress them. Evangelism is taking the side of those living in poverty, it is joining the conflict against those who use their power to maintain the systems that oppress.⁴² He notes that evangelism will conscientize the people who live in poverty, that it will help them to be aware of, and able to engage in the liberation of themselves.⁴³ For Gutiérrez, evangelism is not about a doctrine that the poor must accept, but rather that the church must *be* poor, demonstrated by simple lifestyles, speaking out against injustice, and a focus on service.⁴⁴ It is the church, rather than non-believers, that is converted. When speaking of conversion, Gutiérrez refers to the church and to those who have enough material resources; for example he describes the conversion toward God that one might have from engaging with neighbors⁴⁵ and the conversion to joy one might find from experiencing the ability of people in poverty to engage in celebration.⁴⁶ Gutiérrez' concern is not whether the poor have found Christ, but rather whether the church has been conscientized enough to attend to the needs of those who are poor. I would add that in the U.S. context and elsewhere that requires that people with plenty to be conscientized as to their role in the creation of poverty. Evangelism converts the church and the people with plenty, not the people who live in poverty.

⁴¹ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 68.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 69.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁴⁶ Gutiérrez, *We Drink from our own Wells*, 115.

The question of evangelism is more a question of how church is created, such that it is able to be transformed by the people with whom it interacts. Because of Christ's presence in the world, and in the poor, those engaging the world and people in poverty must be willing to see Christ there and be changed by that experience. Russell and Gutiérrez presume that it is people with enough material resources who need to be converted to ministry with people with less, rather than people with material poverty needing conversion. The implication for food based ministries is that programs need to be set up in such a way that people in need can see the church as dedicated not only to giving of food, but also to the liberation of communities of poverty. The church must clearly be a place where Christ is present, must be open to be transformed by the people it interacts with, and must be able to see the systems that create poverty and its place in those systems. For Russell and Gutiérrez, these are what it means for the church to engage in mission and evangelism.

Community Development and Dependence

Both Gutiérrez and Russell are concerned with the disabling consequences of dependence. One of the arguments against using direct service charity is that the charity itself causes dependence. As such, Lupton, Corbett and Fikkert, and Blue argue that churches should engage in community development instead of direct service charity in various circumstances.⁴⁷ Here I explore Lupton's view of dependence as an example of how those critiquing direct service charity are misunderstanding dependence and its causes. Gutiérrez's argument is that community development itself can cause dependence. Russell notices that paternalistic leadership reinforces dependence and further suggests that working toward independence is not appropriate. Thus, the Christian response to poverty is to look for ways to be interdependent on one another.

⁴⁷ Lupton, *Toxic Charity*, 112, Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 104, Blue, *Practical Justice*, loc. 730.

To understand how to apply Gutiérrez and Russell's ideas to shared ministry I will first describe Lupton's explanation of dependence as caused by charity, and that dependence as the cause of poverty. Lupton claims: "the welfare system has fostered generations of dependency and has severely eroded the work ethic."⁴⁸ Lupton's hope is that people with few material resources will become self-sufficient:

For disadvantaged people to flourish into their full, God-given potential, they must leave behind dependencies that impede their growth. Initiatives that thwart their development, though rightly motivated, must be restructured to reinforce self-sufficiency if they are to become agents of lasting and positive change.⁴⁹

Lupton's example of dependence is the story of Ann, a person with enough, who gets to know Janice, a young single mother who does not have material resources. Ann is moved to help Janice by providing an apartment and other material needs. As time stretches on and Janice continues to have material needs, Ann discovers that Janice is also getting help from others. Ann ends her support in frustration.⁵⁰ Lupton's first conclusion is that their relationship was built only on need, and thus is not a healthy one, which is certainly true. But Lupton continues the analysis to presume that Janice was refusing to become self-reliant.⁵¹ For him, this is an example of Janice's dependence caused by the charity Ann provided. Another interpretation of Ann and Janice's story might be that Janice recognizes that people with enough have no patience for the time and effort it takes to get a job sufficient to pay for an apartment, and no understanding of childcare costs. Although the story starts when Ann arrives to help, it is obvious that Janice has experiences prior to their relationship. With that in mind, one might determine that Janice

⁴⁸ Lupton, *Toxic Charity*, 121.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

suspected that Ann might eventually stop supporting her, and so uses her self-reliance skills and personal power to develop additional support systems. Lupton presumes, or at least implies, instead that Janice is dishonest, unwilling to be accountable, that she is unable to do the right thing. And yet Lupton rightly notices that Janice “feels controlled by the strings attached by the giver.”⁵² Corbett and Fikkert’s notes that the power that comes with giving are relevant here. Corbett successfully places the responsibility on the power of the giver rather than on the person who is in need.⁵³ Lupton instead concludes Janice “sold her story to tenderhearted mothers rather than sell herself to a business-minded employer.”⁵⁴ The implication is that if direct charity services were not available Janice would stop being dependent and finally get paid work. Lupton, along with Corbett and Fikkert, argue for community development to increase the number of jobs, yet they do not seem to notice that until good jobs are available people without work will need to spend time and effort building support systems to ensure that their families have what they need. Lupton has fallen for the stereotypes that Stivers describes, that people who are poor have become dependent as a choice, rather than because of their external forces on their lives.⁵⁵ Dependence is a problem, but it is not direct service charity that causes the poverty.

Gutiérrez argues that one of the causes of dependence is actually community development. He notes the term almost always means economic development only—as is neatly demonstrated in Lupton’s story of Ann’s economic support of Janice above. Seeing primarily an economic problem, Ann provides economic solutions, and when that is not sufficient Lupton responds with an economic concern: that Janice will not get a job. Gutiérrez argues that there

⁵² Lupton, *Toxic Charity*, 60.

⁵³ Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 128.

⁵⁴ Lupton, *Toxic Charity*, 60.

⁵⁵ Stivers, *Disrupting Homelessness*, 109.

cannot be separation of economic, social, political, and cultural development.⁵⁶ From Gutiérrez's perspective, additional questions arise: Why does U.S. culture expect mothers to be separated from their children for paid work? Why does the U.S. lack social support systems to care for children? What are the political systems this country has created that make it so hard to find work, child-care, and affordable housing? And why is Ann, who says she wants to help, so frustrated that Janice is not reacting the way that Ann would? The most important question is not "why is Janice not like Ann?" but rather what are the systems, economic and cultural, that keep resources out of Janice's reach?

Indeed, Gutiérrez says community development theories pre-suppose that the solution to poverty is that those who are poor should take on the cultural practices of those that have more. Essentially, he argues that people who have plenty are presuming they are more culturally advanced than people who have little.⁵⁷ Gutiérrez describes the hope that came from a community development project intended to take "dependent" South American countries and make them "independent" by being more modern.⁵⁸ Because the community development plans were only economic plans, and did not grow out of the culture and experiences of the people, these plans failed.⁵⁹ Gutiérrez notes that one of the important things these plans missed is the way that wealthy nations actually create poverty elsewhere.⁶⁰ The wealth of nations engaging in community development required the dependence of these nations, and therefore dominated the politics of these nations. The developers failed to see how external forces had become internal

⁵⁶ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 15.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

forces.⁶¹ In Gutiérrez's view community development did not end poverty because eliminating a community's dependence on the wealthy would limit the wealth of those who have enough.

The developers could not see the oppression they were part of in their world. Gutiérrez argues "only a class analysis will allow us to see what is really involved in the opposition between oppressed countries and dominant peoples."⁶² Dependence, for Gutiérrez, is caused by domination and cannot be ended simply by plans to change the economy without ending the oppression. On a much smaller scale, local community development programs that are called jobs programs, but are essentially lessons in middle class culture (timeliness, efficiency, order, proper deference, etc.) cannot end dependence. People with plenty will not eradicate poverty by encouraging people with little to act more like them. Any program to end poverty, and oppression, must be lead by the people who do not have enough and who are oppressed.⁶³ Because of this, Gutiérrez argues against community development—those in poverty do not need reforms, or development, that helps them live in the present structures, but rather liberation from the structures.⁶⁴ As such, a weakness of all direct service ministry and one that cannot be overcome by even the best hypothetical shared ministry is that it is ministry within the existing structures, rather than a change of those structures. Shared ministry at its best, thus, should focus on creating conscientization and solidarity and building partnerships on which liberation from the existing structures can be built.

Instead of community development by people with material resources, Gutiérrez suggests starting with the person, and community, in need, and trusting that they have within them the

⁶¹ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 52.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 54.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

next steps to address their challenges. He insists that communities must engage in more than economic development, they must engage in human development, and make room for individuals to control their own future.⁶⁵ For him development theory only succeeds when it takes “into account the situation of dependence and the possibility of becoming free from it.”⁶⁶ Freedom from dependence is liberation; the ability to be in full control of one’s own life. Liberation begins with economic, social, and political independence, but is much more. It is a process of self-growth, it grows out of an individual’s own values, out of their own life story, out of their own work. The goal is liberation from dependence, not by removing the support of needed material resources, but by removing the structural barriers that keep people down. Outsiders do not develop people to this potential, but rather may choose to be in solidarity as the community breaks from the status quo that is holding them back.⁶⁷ Together partnerships change the systems and change people’s relationships to each other.

Russell gets to the question of liberation from dependence in her discussion of relationships with authority in congregations. Although congregation’s members dependence is different than the dependence on material resources, Russell’s analysis of that paternalism turns out to be quite relevant to Gutiérrez’ argument. “Paternalism can be an authority of false love that uses people’s need for strength and assurance to dominate them through a relationship of dependence.”⁶⁸ In congregations, members long for leadership that will tell them how to engage their faith. South American communities long for advice for building a new economy. In meals

⁶⁵ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 16.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁶⁸ Letty Russell, *Household of Freedom: Authority in Feminist Theology*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987, 90.

programs, people who are food insecure long for a reliable food source. In each case paternalistic leadership can use people's longings to dominate the people in need and create a dependent relationships. Corbett identified paternalism as a force that makes direct service ministries unhealthy. As Russell points out, the fact that a leader is caring and nurturing within that dependent, paternalistic system does not reduce the impact of the dominating leadership.⁶⁹ The argument is not that people do not need support, but that people need support that does not produce dependence.⁷⁰ Her example is of a pastor preaching in a way that implies that the bible is not accessible to everyone's own interpretation, or a lay leader who insists on deciding every small group curriculum;⁷¹ people are encouraged to receive, but not to give. People can care for one another, but cannot speak with authority. In a food ministry, people can eat, but not cook. They are dependent on the resources but not allowed to be responsible for providing resources. It is not that dependent people cause their own poverty or lack voice, but that oppressive forces shut voices down and create dependence.

A logical response to paternalism may be to pull away from the oppressive force, to resort to individualism, isolation, or to resign to the sense of dependence. Russell suggests however that autonomy and individualism are not the answer; the answer is interdependence.⁷² Russell, one of the sources for Bouman in Chapter Two, is calling for authority to be a "partnership", a shared relationship of giving and receiving. Partnerships involve interdependence: connections with each other, but also to God, and to the world.⁷³ Partnerships

⁶⁹ Russell, *Household of Freedom*, 90.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 92.

are not simple, they can result in confusion and chaos and disagreement, as more and more voices are included. Many share the authority: many who are interdependent on each other rather than the many dependent on a few. “Because partnerships are living relationships that share the ‘already/not yet’ character of God’s new household, they are always in process and never finished.”⁷⁴ Authority by partnership is messy and incomplete. Shared ministry must share authority; it must create interdependence rather than independence. The goal is not to be served by the church but to be welcomed into the church, to be invited to belong.

Implications for Shared Ministry.

Material poverty is not only a loss for an individual, but also for a community. It impacts the culture and relationships in that community. Spiritual poverty is willingness to recognize that the emptiness humans feel is meant to be filled by God, and it is willingness to allow God to fill that space. Material poverty is specific to people and communities that lack material resources and lack access to systems that could provide resources. Spiritual poverty, on the other hand, is universal; it is part of the commonality of humankind. With shared ministry, the church strives for spiritual poverty, as it is present as good news to in each local community. The church’s response to material poverty should not be economic development but human development. The church’s presence and action in human development is its mission, evangelism, and calling. It is not concerned with whether direct service charity causes dependence, but rather is focused on how poverty creates dependence, and how human development creates liberation and interdependence. Shared ministry provides the church with interactions with the community, interactions that transform and liberate the church as much as it transforms and liberates the people who need material resources.

⁷⁴ Russell, *Household of Freedom*, 92.

Conscientization and Solidarity

When people realize they are interdependent they can begin to develop solidarity. For Gutiérrez and Russell the important question is whether people with resources to share have developed *solidarity* with those who have less. In order to do that, they must be conscientized—people with material resources must learn to see the role they play in creating poverty, and the people who need material resources must learn to recognize the systemic barriers that keep them in poverty. Without conscientization and solidarity, direct service charity perpetuates, rather than overcomes, poverty.

Conscientization

Conscientization involves people who are food insecure learning about the way systemic poverty hurts all who live in poverty, and people who are food secure seeing the benefit they gain from a system that allows some people to live in poverty. It is about all people learning that they are interdependent on each other. Russell argues that church should be where women are educated and empowered to be “co-strugglers in the gospel.”⁷⁵ I am certain she would agree that people without food are co-strugglers with those who have plenty of food, together finding liberation from food insecurity. To do this women, and people with food insecurity, need to be conscientized to the way they have been kept out of this co-struggling. Gutiérrez emphasizes the instructive role for people with enough, that they should help those without enough to see how systems have created the division between people with different material resources. When individuals with little blame their life circumstances on their bad choices, the systems need to be exposed—the way bad decisions for poor people can be catastrophic, while bad decisions for people with plenty are merely annoyances and set backs. Gutiérrez says the work is to “make the

⁷⁵ Russell, *Church in the Round*, 95.

oppressed become aware that they are human beings.”⁷⁶ The work of the church is to conscientize the poor, to show them how the systems that have been created to trap them.⁷⁷ Gutiérrez trusts that when they see those systems they will develop the right tools to fight that systemic oppression for themselves.

In Chapter Two, I explored Saul Alinsky’s similar idea that outsiders bring conscientization to community organizing. The organizer does not bring the solution, the organizer brings the outside viewpoint that helps people living in poverty to see the bigger picture.⁷⁸ People with material resources must also make space to let themselves be conscientized by the people who have little, they must be willing to recognize that having more material things can lead to the erroneous assumption of increased importance, or a sense of power. People with plenty need help recognizing that they have the power to choose what food is served, and to choose to serve food, choices that are denied the person who needs food. Gutiérrez and Russell would want a non-toxic direct service food ministry to include conscientization to the systemic causes of poverty for all involved. Direct service charity should not hide the systemic challenges of poverty, nor of each person’s role in those systems. Shared ministry must work toward conscientization of both the food secure and food insecure volunteers

Solidarity

Conscientization is a necessary step for creating solidarity. Solidarity is *action* taken to build a society without exploitation and marginalization. Gutiérrez says: “[f]or Christians this action is an efficacious act of charity, of love for neighbor and love for God in the poor.”⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 154.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁷⁸ Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*, 122.

⁷⁹ Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, 21.

Solidarity is not casual friendship or distant, abstract love. For Gutiérrez, solidarity is an action, an action comfortable with revolution, with an overturning of the status quo. Unlike either Pathak and Runyon's neighborliness⁸⁰ or Heuertz and Pohl's friendship,⁸¹ Gutiérrez is imagining a relationship not only with individuals, but also with a community. Solidarity requires that people with enough know people in need well enough, and care deeply enough, that every need is met with an obvious response, to give what is needed, to stand up against oppression, to fight for systemic change. In this model, the church accompanies people, people with and without things, in their journey to achieve the fullness of humanity, their journey to the end of degradation, the end of exploitation, the end of material poverty and all of its damaging effects.

To serve people who are poor, Gutiérrez argues that a person must know the experiences of the poor deeply enough to inform their own faith. It is not enough for spirituality to be parallel to the spirituality of the poor,⁸² it must be immersed in the world of poverty. It must know the people who live in poverty as more than strangers waiting to be served. For Gutiérrez, the church accompanies people in all parts of their lives, the parts that are spiritual, and the parts that are material. Faith includes ritual and prayer, but is just as much part of work, family, home life, and in the public square. By journeying together in all of these parts of life, Gutiérrez is confident people with plenty will see that oppression causes material poverty, and as a church, will work to overcome it. Solidarity requires enough knowledge of one another that people with enough material resources can see the ways that poverty is a by-product of wealth.⁸³ The church

⁸⁰ Pathak and Runyon, *The Art of Neighboring*, throughout.

⁸¹ Heuertz and Pohl, *Friendship at the Margins*, throughout.

⁸² Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, 31.

⁸³ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 51.

encourages this learning and engages this work, not out of some humanitarian instinct, but because the church goes to where God is, and God is a liberating force among the poor.

Russell argues that those who have enough must constantly ask how people at the margins can shape, that is, can change, the faith, goals, practices, and organizational structures of those who have material resources.⁸⁴ This will create a more equal place for people who are food insecure at the table of church-based food ministries. The servers must know the people they are serving well enough to know their faith experiences and trust them enough to welcome them as volunteers. The goal is to know volunteers well enough that they change the supporting church's perspectives, theology, and communal life together. At the same time, the goal is to welcome people without the presumption that they need to be changed, to be fixed, that they do not need to become like us, in order to be one of us.⁸⁵ That is, people with plenty of food must be willing to see people who come to eat as already part of their church. By sharing new experiences, seeing the world from new perspectives, and listening to new voices, new theological actions will be developed, new ways for people with enough to work toward an ethical approach to direct service ministry.

Russell (following Gutiérrez and other liberation theologians) argues people with enough must be engaged in the community of people who are poor in order to be where God is. Russell turns to the story of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31-46 to show that God insists that it is among the poor that Christ and God are found.⁸⁶ Russell emphasizes that it is not the good works of people living in poverty that bring them closer to Christ, any more than it is good works

⁸⁴ Russell, *Church in the Round*, 25.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 121.

of people with plenty. It is simply that God has made it clear that God is present among people who need food, drink, clothing, who are strangers, sick, and in prison. God has a preferential option for the poor. Because God is with the poor, people with enough material resources are invited to be in solidarity with the poor in order to find God.⁸⁷ While Corbett and Fikkert note that God chooses to work with the weak and the outsiders,⁸⁸ they are careful not to use liberation theology language of solidarity, perhaps wary of the impact of political language on their evangelical readership. But for Russell and Gutiérrez *solidarity* is about God and a community's response to God. The church is with God by being with the poor.

The language of solidarity is important because it moves the ministry to be about *us*—those of us with material resources and those of us without them, together, instead of about an *us* who serves *them*. Russell says: “[f]aithfulness to Christ calls us to be constantly open to those who are marginal in our own church communities and in the wider community and to ask critical question of faith and practice from the perspective of the margin.”⁸⁹ The only way those who have always had enough can learn the perspective from the margin is for them to be there on the margin. For food ministries, that means getting to know, to learn from, and to be in solidarity with, the people who come to get food.

Gutiérrez notes that the risk of solidarity is high; Jesus died as a result of his solidarity: “Jesus *freely* decides to give his life in *solidarity* with those who are under the power of death.”⁹⁰ In Gutiérrez's context standing with the poor actually carries the risk of death. In U.S. food ministries, the risk is much less, and yet risk is still real. It requires moving outside of a person's

⁸⁷ Russell, *Church in the Round*, 121.

⁸⁸ Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 43.

⁸⁹ Russell, *Church in the Round*, 25.

⁹⁰ Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, 92, *italics original*.

comfort zone, sitting with the oppressed, the hungry, with those in need, even at the loss of social standing.⁹¹ It takes accepting the risks of being rejected, misunderstood, of discovering new information that challenges an existing worldview. It takes giving up power. It is in solidarity with those who are under the power of poverty, the power of an early death, that Christians with ample material resources can be converted to solidarity with the poor.⁹² People with material resources can sanitize the threat of death. They may struggle with finding meaning in life, but not with finding enough food, clothing or housing to prevent death. Busyness and exhaustion are overwhelming, but are not the same as desperation to hang onto life. Isolation, illness, and aging are scary, but are not the same as the worry that the flu will result in unemployment, food insecurity, and homelessness. Death in a stark hospital room prompts fear, but not the same terror as watching the slow degradation of children's lives as they have their significant meals at the school cafeteria, as they fail to get the education they deserve, as they fail to get the health care they need.

Those who have enough can know these stories from the newspaper and from books, but that is not what builds solidarity. Solidarity grows from meeting individuals, getting to know them and being part of their lives. It comes from building community together and developing a life-based spirituality together. Gutiérrez insists that “[t]here is no aspect of human life that is unrelated to the following of Jesus A spirituality is not restricted to the so-called religious aspects of life: prayer and worship.”⁹³ Indeed in solidarity, diverse community becomes a

⁹¹ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 152.

⁹² Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, 93.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 88.

requirement for spirituality. Meals ministries become spiritual ministries when those involved are meeting, knowing, and loving their neighbors, and sharing food which all bodies need.

“True love exists only among equals,”⁹⁴ Gutiérrez argues. As equals, people can become more honest with each other, those who have plenty become more honest about their weaknesses and fears, those who have not enough become more honest about their gifts and strengths.

Stories become shared stories. Over time love becomes more and more authentic.

“Authentic love tries to start with the concrete needs of the other and not with the ‘duty’ of practicing love. Love is respectful of others and therefore feels obliged to base its action on an analysis of their situation and needs. Works in behalf of the neighbor are not done in order to channel idle energies or to give available personnel something to do; they are done because the other has needs and it is urgent that we attend to them.”⁹⁵

Food ministries can engage in authentic love by sitting down at the table with people in need and eating (e.g., Talking, Listening). Engaging with one another as neighbors, and friends, and then beyond that, in solidarity, able to stand up for the rights of a new sibling. Authentic love finds God in the food and in each other. Salvation is found in solidarity with one another. Shared ministry will be ethical charity to the extent it makes space to know people deeply enough to stand with them in their poverty, where God is standing with each of us.

Implications for Shared Ministry.

The work of Gutiérrez and Russell suggests that shared food ministries need to strive to create an environment for conscientization and work to develop solidarity. Because shared ministry provides resources at the individual level it must be explicit in making opportunities for conscientization to the systemic causes of food insecurity. To create solidarity, there must be opportunities to get to know each other well enough to be called to action *for* one another, *with*

⁹⁴ Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, 104.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 108.

one another. Solidarity is a partnership. To create that solidarity shared ministry must include taking risks to learn how poverty and wealth are connected, and to be open to being changed by one another. Solidarity changes people's faith and people's lives. In shared ministry, food is given because people have a right to food, and because God is present among those who do not have enough food. That is, people with food security, and people without food security, give food in order to serve God. Shared ministry creates relationships in order to get to know God, but along the way it must include getting to know the causes of poverty. Solidarity in food ministries requires that those who have enough are willing risk real relationship: to let other people lead, to recognize the equality of their siblings in Christ.

Leadership

In shared ministry, people who are food insecure are encouraged to use their skills as volunteers and organizers of direct service ministry. In Chapter Two, several of the authors surveyed argued direct service charity fails to recognize that the fact that someone needs food or other material resources does not mean they do not have gifts or leadership skills. Gutiérrez is concerned that people should be seen (by themselves and others) as gifted and given the opportunity to work using their gifts. Russell uses the lens of feminism to critique the view that the gifts of leadership are limited. When people who are different work together, they can learn together to cross boundaries and recognize the wide variety of leadership skills within each other. Russell argues for including more people as leaders and also notes that making a space for people to contribute adds to the sense of belonging. Working together broadens the definition of hospitality—people are welcomed not only as outsiders and guests, but as belonging to the community. Her vision of church is of a place where voices are heard across boundaries of difference and where leadership rises up from the margins. Her feminist critique of leadership

contributes significantly to the question of how food ministries can develop a radical equality between people who have much and people who have little. To get to the place where everyone's skills are appreciated requires a look at the challenge of work and the mistaken idea that giving people material resources makes them avoid work.

Work Together

Gutiérrez and Russell identify that it is oppression that creates the story that people who live with poverty do not want to work. Gutiérrez emphasizes the value of being able to control one's own work, and Russell emphasizes that the leadership table can be expanded when church widens the description of what is leadership. Together they demonstrate that shared ministry can be done by inviting people who are food insecure to volunteer to work at food programs. In what looks at first to be a similar argument, several of the authors surveyed in Chapter Two also argue that work is important. It is important to recognize that Gutiérrez and Russell are arguing that there are systems in place keeping people who live in poverty from being able to work to change their community. In contrast to that the critiques of direct service charity are that by providing food, churches are taking away the *requirement* that people who are poor work for the material resources they need.

Kevin Blue, in *Practical Justice*, lays out the evangelical concern about direct service charity and paid work. He argues that spending time without work or other responsibilities can wear down problem solving skills and wear out a person's confidence. He notes that "[s]ome have not worked for so long that evil spiritual habits become the norm, and then, as sin deceives them, they are convinced that working is actually worse for them than receiving a hand-out."⁹⁶ Although Blue's book is excellent on acknowledging the systemic causes of poverty, he still

⁹⁶ Blue, *Practical Justice*, loc. 635.

reverts to presuming that people who accept handouts do not *want* to work, indeed that it is an “evil spiritual habit” to not work. Corbett and Fikkert similarly identify work as a spiritual issue, suggesting that individuals glorify God by supporting themselves and their families with paid work.⁹⁷ While both authors acknowledge that disability may keep some people from working, they insist that people in poverty cannot improve their poverty unless they “*earn* sufficient material things through their own labor.”⁹⁸ Work for Lupton is the key to affirming human dignity.⁹⁹ His concern is that people’s personal power is taken away when programs do for people what they can do themselves,¹⁰⁰ while Blue names concern that not working means not problem solving.¹⁰¹

Blue has failed to recognize the problem solving and skill development people without material resources require to survive. Blue, Lupton, and Corbett and Fikkert have identified that work is important, even critical, for people who do not have material resources but not whether it is important for people who have inherited money, or have retired from paid work, or whose primary work is in the home. In contrast to their arguments in favor of work, Stivers is worried about programs that *require* work; she wonders if this is a test a person must pass to prove they are deserving before they are given the resources needed to get by.¹⁰² Is work dignity? Is it a test of worthiness?

⁹⁷ Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 78.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 79, *italics original*.

⁹⁹ Lupton, *Toxic Charity*, 154.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁰¹ Blue, *Practical Justice*, loc. 671.

¹⁰² Stivers, *Disrupting Homelessness*, 115.

Gutiérrez argues there is dignity in work, especially if the worker has control over it.¹⁰³ But, as noted above, Gutiérrez is disturbed by limiting the discussion of poverty to economic questions. The church's goal is not simply for people to have more things but rather "the *creation of a new humanity*."¹⁰⁴ Gutiérrez does not buy into the stereotype that people in poverty refuse to work, but rather is concerned with the way systems limit people's ability to work, or to have dignity in the work that they do. Gutiérrez says work is an antidote to dependence but suggest that people *want* to do the work of leadership, *want* to take on the authority to change the systems that make them dependent on outside forces.

Gutiérrez says: "[t]o work, to transform this world, is to become a [hu]man and to build the human community; it is also to save."¹⁰⁵ Work is not necessarily employment; it is the work of change. He argues that everyone is saved, that is, *liberated*, by opportunities to do their own work, to be engaged with others in the work of community. That is, liberation is something that people with less do for themselves, through their own growing awareness of themselves and the culture they are enmeshed in.¹⁰⁶ As co-participants in their salvation, people must be co-participants in the work of the world.¹⁰⁷ This is a very different concern than either that of Blue et al, or Stivers, this is not a statement that it is morally superior to get one's material needs met by earning resources, nor about work requirements to demonstrate worthiness. Instead it is the decision of a people to take control of their situation and do the work that will make their lives better. I would note that to do this many people with few resources will need to be conscientized,

¹⁰³ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 66.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 81, *italics original*.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 91.

¹⁰⁶ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 57.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 101.

as discussed above, so that they see how their situation is not caused by their bad decisions, and see their own gifts and skills that they have to contribute to this work. “[T]he process of liberation requires the *active participation of the oppressed*,”¹⁰⁸ for those with material resources, their act of solidarity is to affirm this. Direct service charities must have space for people who need resources to find a place to work to be recognized as having gifts, to be recognized as a leader, to be known in community and to be honored as an agent of one’s own destiny. Rich and poor alike are liberated by their efforts to create a just society, liberated by their satisfaction with the work, liberated by working together for God’s Realm here on earth.

As a feminist theologian, Russell looks at liberation as a question of *hospitality* through the lens of oppression. As Gutiérrez noted above, this lens is important to understanding class differences, and to recognizing the ways that race, gender, immigration status, disability, and other oppressions impact the context of each individual that is struggling with life without sufficient material resources. Those with enough material resources may also face oppression based on their particular context of race, gender, disability, education, etc. Crossing the boundary of difference in material resources starts with listening to one another. Russell focuses on listening to new voices not only to hear what they need, and dream, but also to help people in need take leadership roles. Feminist leadership shares power and authority to be sure that voices from the margin are taken seriously.¹⁰⁹ For direct service ministries to become shared ministry they will need to hear, and act on what they hear, from people who are food insecure. In her book *Just Hospitality*, Russell argues that the goal is to create partnerships that develop new ways to

¹⁰⁸ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 67, *italics original*.

¹⁰⁹ Russell, *Church in the Round*, 57.

be in relationship.¹¹⁰ Partnerships between people who have plenty and people who have little will create new forms of ministry, where the people who are there to eat can share their gifts and their resources as easily as those who are there to serve. Shared ministry makes space for those new forms of ministry.

Leadership is Not Limited

While Letty Russell certainly suggests that those in power must give up some of that power in order to include those that have previously been left out, she emphasizes that leadership is not a limited commodity. “Rather, power and leadership gifts multiply as they are shared and more and more persons become partners in communities of faith and struggle.”¹¹¹ If the goal is inclusion, many people can be empowered to demonstrate their gifts and leadership in shared ministries. In fact, direct service ministries could be evaluated based on the number of people encouraged to use their gifts, rather than on the efficiency of the program. This would be feminist round table leadership, leadership that is about partnership not authority over,¹¹² about power-with, not power-over.

Food ministries may feel like community if they include sitting and eating with the people in need, asking about their lives, and treating people with respect, but as long as the rules require that only some people can serve, and others can only eat, it is a divided community. It is in using their gifts that a person is welcomed completely into community. Recognizing new gifts leads to a more diverse community,¹¹³ but also to more of a sense of belonging. While to be a

¹¹⁰ Letty Russell, *Just Hospitality: God's Welcome in a World of Difference*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009, 49.

¹¹¹ Russell, *Church in the Round*, 56.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 57.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 70.

guest is more pleasant than being a client; to be invited to be a leader is an invitation to truly be *one of us*. Without the rights of leadership, the people who come to receive food are not given the full rights of membership into the community. Shared ministry intentionally expands the rights of leadership to people with and without food security.

Belonging

For Russell, a just hospitality is not only about welcoming people, but about being “partners with strangers, to welcome those Christ welcomed” despite differences,¹¹⁴ or even enjoying differences. It is about creating a community of belonging. Instead of thinking of hospitality as something one person gives and someone else receives, Russell argues that justice-based hospitality must be a “two way street of mutual ministry where we often exchange roles.”¹¹⁵ People offering direct service ministries must overcome the fear and stereotypes of people without material resources as diseased other, or as wounded beyond repair, as Stivers has noted. Instead, it takes seeing people who are food insecure as having gifts they can contribute to the ministry. Note that if hospitality is defined as niceness, cleanliness, propriety, or as about rules and order, that will be limit who is included.¹¹⁶ Just hospitality presumes welcoming people across difference.

Russell notes that peoples’ differences can be used as tools to oppress or as tools for understanding.¹¹⁷ It is easy, even when working together, to label people who are different from us as less-than. To avoid this, Russell suggests three things to notice: the power dynamic, the

¹¹⁴ Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 20.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 80.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 31.

perspective of those on the margins, and *rejoicing*.¹¹⁸ The power dynamic is the way that developers of a food ministry automatically have power whether they want it or not.¹¹⁹ *Rejoicing* is the idea that crossing borders cannot be done perfectly, but there is celebration in the fact that “God’s knowledge is always unfolding.”¹²⁰ That is, working on understanding develops skills needed to recognize the power dynamics, and to hear the voices from margins, and thus, God’s path unfolds. Heuertz and Pohl note the power of celebration and peoples’ ability to be generous in those celebrations in poor communities. “Surprisingly, it is our friends who are poor who teach us the most about celebration. Those with very little often throw the best parties—sparing no expense. They find resourceful and often costly ways to practice generosity.”¹²¹ Russell reminds Christians that it was a long time ago that the Pentecost spirit was poured out on all people (Acts 2:17) and it has taken a long time for that truth to become more and more visible.¹²² It is hard work and the results get better and better from the effort to be fully inclusive of the diversity in ministry.

There was a time, Russell offers, when diversity was seen as in tension with unity, the goal was to have one or the other, or to find the tension point between the two, and to balance at that point.¹²³ For today, in search of just hospitality, Russell suggests giving up the either/or struggle and instead looking for unity in hospitality.¹²⁴ That unity is certainly difficult, but does

¹¹⁸ Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 43.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹²¹ Heuertz and Pohl, *Friendship at the Margins*, 132.

¹²² Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 61.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 65.

not require people to be the same as each other. Her model of hospitality expects that people will be very different from one another. Yet with those differences she is imagining that people will feel like they can begin to belong with one another. Shared leadership implies that the people who need services or resources will be welcomed as part of the community that is offering services. The church becomes not only a place that provides resources, but also place to belong in community.

Implications for Shared Ministry

Many food ministries fall short of developing into communities where participants can feel a sense of belonging. The challenge for those who have enough material resources is to recognize that the ability to give things is not liberation; it is power. With power comes the ability to limit who can volunteer, which is then power over the people in need. To be part of creating God's Realm, power must be used in partnership as power-with. People with material resources engaged in shared food ministries must sit with those who need things, must see the gifts people bring to food ministries, and must get out of the way so that others can lead. Shared ministry makes space for voluntary involvement in work that is meaningful and uses the skills that people bring with them, whether they come with material resources or not. Shared ministry makes space for rejoicing and celebrating small successes.

Conclusion: The Liberation Theology Criteria for Shared Ministry

Chapter Two engaged proponents of ending direct service charity because of the way it hurts the people who give the resources and the people who receive them. Chapter Three considered the biblical arguments for engaging in direct service charity. This chapter has introduced the idea that converting direct service charity to shared ministry must include the development of solidarity. Solidarity creates a partnership approach to ministry; the people who

need the resources and the people who have the resources eat together and work together. People must first be conscientized—to learn from one another to see the systemic causes of poverty, to avoid the stereotypes of individuals living with poverty, and to recognize that poverty is what causes dependence. Engaging in shared ministry is not a replacement for community organizing and community development. Structural change is needed and it is not enough to only help people to adapt to the systems that perpetuate poverty. The church engaging in shared ministry must attend to the power dynamic created by having access to material resources, by creating partnerships, and engaging in power-with those who need resources. The church engaging in shared ministry will expand the leadership table by recognizing that leadership looks different in different cultures, and by inviting people to use their skills. The church engaging in shared ministry will offer voluntary opportunities to be part of the community and part of the work. The goal of incorporating people into the work of the ministry is not a work requirement but rather a chance to build a just hospitality, all people who participate in the ministry are welcomed to be in leadership and welcomed to be served: eating because everyone needs food, eating *together* because everyone needs community. Finally, the community must rejoice over individual and communal successes together.

PART ONE SUMMARY: CRITERIA FOR SHARED MINISTRY

Chapter Two explores the problems with direct service ministry and proposed that shared ministry can overcome those challenges. The argument is that churches can continue to provide material resources for people who need them, but in a new way that avoids direct service weaknesses. To do that I concluded that shared ministry must start with the needs and dreams of people who are food insecure, must recognize the systemic nature of poverty and not blame it on individuals, must bring people together in ways that use everyone's skills, must resist stereotyping, and class-based oppression, and must welcome people to belong to the church community engaged in ministry. Chapter Three uses Matthew 25:31-46 to argue both that people who are food insecure are called to help people who are in need, and that it is in direct service ministry that people encounter Christ. Christ is a guest at the table, rather than the server. Acts 6:1-7 reminds churches that people feel most fully members when they are invited to take a turn in the work of church, and that it is in eating together, especially eating that crosses cultural boundaries, that Christian community is developed. Chapter Four uses the writing of Gustavo Gutiérrez and Letty Russell to argue for a liberation theology approach to shared ministry. This proposes that a mixed-class community can develop solidarity with one another if first the participants are conscientized to the systemic causes of poverty. Churches engaged in direct service must be conscious of the threats of dependence, but must recognize that it is poverty that creates that dependence, and that the solution to dependence is not independence but interdependence—people must rely on one another in community. To do that the definition of leadership must be expanded to go beyond middle-class standards and to look for ways to

include as many people as possible as volunteers in developing shared ministry. Everyone must be welcomed as volunteers/givers, and as eaters/receivers of the ministry.

Chapters One through Four explored what is wrong with direct service charity, how oppression contributes to the problems with direct service charity, and how biblical and liberation theology resources contribute to a theory of shared ministry. What is the combined result of these foundations? What must be done to make shared ministry something that is less toxic, more helpful, than what many are doing now? How can shared ministry to create a community of belonging?

I propose five criteria for shared ministry.

1) Shared ministry starts with the people in need, not with the people with resources.

People who are food insecure need help, but that does not mean that they do not know what is needed to solve their problem. Shared ministry starts with people in need because it recognizes that they know more about the problem, have important input into the solutions, and have the skills to be part of the solution. In shared food ministry, the people who are food insecure are the most important resource that a church has in identifying why, what, where, when, and how a program should take place.

2) Shared ministry requires that everyone eat together. Christ has made it clear that he is present in, perhaps even *is* the people who do not have enough food. In shared ministry, the volunteers eat with those who attend the ministry and get to know them as Christ in the world. Shared ministry aims to replicate the early church model of eating together as the basis for Christian community. Shared ministry is intentional about encouraging conscientization of people with material resources to the systemic causes of poverty, and conscientization of people without material resources to the benefits of solidarity with one another. Shared ministry engages

in eating together, and listening to one another, because that is what church is. Shared ministry is not a mission of the church, nor an evangelism project, but rather *is* church, church where people with and without food security are together the body of Christ.

3) *In shared ministry everyone is invited to work.* Shared ministry acknowledges that Christian scripture calls on everyone to serve those who are hungry and that the early church struggled with giving everyone a turn for service. Shared ministry insists that belonging to a community grows from sharing in the work. The definition of who is able to take on leadership expands to the make space for all who choose to serve. Shared ministry creates a just hospitality where everyone is welcome to be a member rather than a guest.

4) *Shared ministry attends to power dynamics: to oppression and domination.* Shared ministry is direct service, and as such, will not change the systems that keep people food insecure and impoverished. It is part of the vision of shared ministry to set the stage so that people engaged in shared ministry, those with and without material resources, will be encouraged to engage in systemic change. Shared ministry makes a goal to start each new adjustment, new practice, and new program, by starting with the people who are food insecure. Shared ministry takes seriously the power dynamic created when one group of people has access to resources and another group does not. Shared ministry must be ministry where those involved are encouraged to notice and to change in order to overcome oppression. Shared ministry recognizes that it takes a conscious effort to overcome the unequal distribution of power and the forces of oppression in the ministry and in the world.

5) *Shared ministry rejoices as community.* Letty Russell identified the last step as rejoicing together. Shared ministry creates community that shares in food, stories, parties, congratulations, and celebrations.

Introduction to Part Two

Part Two of this project explores ministry sites that are engaged in shared food ministry in order to describe what it looks like in practice. Chapter Five considers the few written resources that describe shared ministry and lays out the research plan for visiting sites with shared ministry. Chapter Six describes the results of my site observations. Chapter Seven concludes the project and offers ideas for further research in shared ministry.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESEARCH PLAN

In most cases direct service ministries involve volunteers who have material resources giving resources to people who need them; this creates a power imbalance. As noted in chapter two, this power imbalance perpetuates stereotypes and is toxic both to those who give and those who receive. This power balance can be reduced, and perhaps eliminated, by using *shared ministry*. Shared ministry expands leadership so that those with and without material resources are cooking, serving, and cleaning up; sorting, arranging, and distributing; planting, weeding, and harvesting; planning, supervising and organizing; and then finally evaluating the success of the program, together. Shared food ministry requires eating together and working together. As volunteers eat and work together, they should be intentional in working toward conscientization to the power dynamics of classism and in building solidarity so as to overcome classism and the systemic forces that cause poverty. Shared ministry should include celebration—rejoicing in individual and community successes, small and large.

Eating together is most straightforward in meals programs, but food pantries and gardens must also find a way for all the volunteers to share in receiving, not just in giving. Working together may start with simple tasks like setting up and cleaning up but should eventually lead to true shared leadership, including decision-making. By acting as community, and intentionally addressing oppression, people engaged with the food pantry, meal program, or garden may begin to recognize class-based oppression, to see the intersections with race and gender oppression, to notice the systems in society and in the program that perpetuate oppression, and to work together to resist it. Finally, celebrations include those that are personal such as birthdays and finding a

home or a job, as well as community celebrations of anniversaries, small improvements to the ministry, or other events in the developing story of the ministry. This work is simple, like getting to know each other, and hard, like changing the world.

Where does shared ministry exist? This chapter begins with popular books that describe three locations where some form of shared ministry is taking place. While these books do not use the language of shared ministry, they describe programs that have some shared components and offer some insights about how shared ministry might work. Following these book reviews, I develop my research plan for visiting and observing four church-based direct service food ministry sites.

Resources for Shared Ministry

I did an extensive search for stories of shared ministry in research and then looked in popular literature. I found a children's book, a how-to book, and two books by a woman who runs a food pantry. These books help to develop a picture of what shared ministry could be. The children's book, *Last Stop on Market Street*, by Mark de la Peña, illustrated by Christian Robinson, introduces characters who are both volunteers at, and recipients of food from, a soup kitchen. David Apple, in *Not Just a Soup Kitchen*, describes how to create a meals program where people are welcomed as guests, where the volunteers get to know the participants and build relationships. Sara Miles has written two books on the food pantry at St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church in San Francisco, where most of the volunteers are people who originally came to pick up food.

*Last Stop on Market Street*¹

In this book for pre-readers, the reader follows CJ and his Nana on the bus from their church to a meal program at the end of Market Street. By the time the young boy arrives at the soup kitchen with his grandmother, it is clear he is there to eat. During the bus ride from the church to the soup kitchen, CJ complains about all that their family must do without, things he sees that others in his school have access to. CJ and Nana are very poor, but she responds to each missing item with a positive interpretation. They arrive at the soup kitchen and the pictures show CJ and Nana behind the serving line, they are volunteers serving their neighbors, many of whom they know. This book shares the message Matthew 25:31-46, that people must share food with those who need it, from the perspective of a family with few resources. As I addressed in Chapter Three, this family is not sharing from excess; they are simply Christians giving food. The story presents the idea of shared ministry, that anyone can and should help others, as a reality for this family. I can imagine using this book to introduce adults who have enough resources to the idea that everyone wants to help serve. Although it is a children's book, it provides a non-threatening introduction to shared ministry.

Not Just a Soup Kitchen

David Apple, whose book I explored in chapters two and four, explores the relationships that can be developed at food ministries. Apple found recovery from his own difficult life through sharing food with others² and argues against ministry *to* the poor and homeless, and for ministry *with*. At his Philadelphia ministry the idea of *with* is not having participants serve, but

¹ Mark de la Peña, *Last Stop on Market Street*, illustrated by Christian Robinson, New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2015.

² Apple, *Not Just a Soup Kitchen*, loc. 63.

rather “dining with church members whose sole ministry is to sit, eat and talk.”³ One church member noted that she could not distinguish the “guests from the hosts,”⁴ a sign that volunteers are recognizing that people all have similar needs in this world. Still it is church members who do all of the food prep and cleanup. While Apple notes “[t]here is something for everyone to do,”⁵ he is referring to young children and teens, not to the people coming to eat. Essentially, people who come to receive food are permitted to be guests, not to be members. The goal is “friendship evangelism,”⁶ that is getting to know the guests at a deep level, connecting week after week, building relationships.

However Apple describes the relationship building in a one-sided way. His success stories are of people who found Jesus, and recovery from addictions,⁷ and does not include any similar changes in the people who are volunteers. The goal is to change people who are food insecure, rather than to love and find mutual relationship with them. While Apple’s focus is on relationship, the power dynamic of people who have resources deciding the intended outcomes remains in place. The book in the end was not about shared ministry because people who do not have enough food are not allowed to volunteer. Apple argues for creating relationships but fails to recognize that all people need to be changed by ministry with each other. This book begs the question of whether a program whose primary goal is conversion to Christianity can create mutuality of relationship. These questions are significant, but not within the scope of this project.

³ Apple, *Not Just a Soup Kitchen*, loc. 606.

⁴ *Ibid.*, loc. 621.

⁵ *Ibid.*, loc. 606.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, loc. 635.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

Sara Miles grew up outside Christianity and became Christian through a moving interaction during a Eucharist. In two books: *Take this Bread*, 2007, and *Jesus Freak*, 2010, Miles describes how her own conversion, through the bread of the Eucharist, led her to volunteer to serve communion, and that serving communion lead her to start a food pantry at St. Gregory's. About the ministry of the food pantry, she writes, "it was communion, after all, but with free groceries instead of bread and wine."⁸ At the start she was anxious about the way direct service charity could be demeaning but also knew that it was significant to create a ministry that welcomed everyone. "Our neighbors, friends and strangers, were hungry. The very least a Christian Church could do, for starters, was feed them."⁹ She felt called to feed people.

The ministry started with handing out bags of food to 35 people, with no rules, if you showed up you got a bag of food.¹⁰ As the program grew to serve 200 people a week¹¹ Miles would hang out, talking to people as they waited in line for their turn.¹² She reflects,

[A]s I got to know them, I started to see more clearly how the people who came to the pantry were like me: messed up, often prickly or difficult, yearning for friendship. I saw how they were hungry, the way I was. And then I had a glimpse of them being like Jesus again: as God, made flesh and blood.¹³

⁸ Sara Miles, *Take This Bread: A Radical Conversion*, New York: Ballantine Books, 2007, 104.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 120.

¹² *Ibid.*, 127.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 129.

People asked to pray, to sit in the quiet space. Over time Miles realized she hoped that “the pantry would be a church and not a social service program.”¹⁴ Throughout the book she makes it clear that the relationship building is mutual, people who are food secure and food insecure are learning from each other in the same way Miles describes herself learning, “We’ll stay hungry if we eat alone.”¹⁵ The program’s focus is on the community more than the food.

While at the start the volunteers were members of St. Gregory’s, over time less were people with plenty and more were people who lacked material resources: “they were unofficial: visitors who came to get groceries and then stuck around to help. They were more often than not misfits: jobless or homeless or a little crazy or just really poor.”¹⁶ Many, not all, had backgrounds in restaurant work.¹⁷ Miles describes it as less an organization and more a community.¹⁸ Everyone was welcome to choose to belong, simply by showing up. The program began as only a pantry, but eventually those who volunteered made soup and ate together before the pantry opened.¹⁹ She notes that one of the skills of the volunteers was that “they were finely tuned to scams and hustles of all kinds” and thus able to adjust the program to increase its fairness.²⁰ There were people who did not work out—some middle class people who could not set boundaries, some people with mental illness that could not deal with the stress, some whose

¹⁴ Miles, *Take This Bread*, 130. This statement touches on Russell and Gutiérrez’s concept of mission as being the church itself, rather than a program of the church. Similarly, it connects to Finger and McGowan’s discussion of meals as church in the first century. However intriguing, these concepts are beyond the scope of this project.

¹⁵ Sarah Miles, *Jesus Freak: Feeding, Healing, Raising the Dead*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010, 26.

¹⁶ Miles, *Take This Bread*, 134.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 135.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 208.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 211.

goal was to take unfair advantage of the ministry.²¹ But Miles and the other leaders of the ministry insisted on continuing to give people a chance to volunteer and found that many people wanted the opportunity to volunteer more than they wanted the food.²² One volunteer described how the experience changed him after his years of addiction and living on the streets: “this gave me the sense that there was the possibility of happiness again. Now every time I give out food and make contact and am able to smile at somebody...I’m being fed by it.”²³ Everyone was welcome, not only to come, but also to volunteer. There were rules, volunteers could not steal or start fights or call others names or be high while they were serving, but they could be people with felony records, and they could be people who were addicts or dirty or lonely or people living with mental illness.²⁴ The ministry therefore was inefficient, disorganized chaos.²⁵

Volunteers reported regularly that giving food away was not something that was merely empowering or rewarding or created a sense of worth, but that “giving food away changed everything.”²⁶ She notes that when people with enough fail to share the opportunity to serve, they are holding back the way that they have experienced Jesus: “giving was the basis for authority at the pantry: people became leaders because they worked hard and took care of others.”²⁷ At St. Gregory’s the focus was on shared work, and the result was community.

²¹ Miles, *Take This Bread*, 213.

²² *Ibid.*, 214.

²³ *Ibid.*, 215.

²⁴ Miles, *Jesus Freak*, 24.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

Implications for Research

It is interesting that there are so few resources describing food ministries where people who are food insecure are part of the program, but it is hard to draw conclusions from that fact. Mark de la Peña's book shows that the idea that everyone wants to serve is not a foreign idea. What may be surprising to the middle-class reader is that this would apply to people who do not have enough, as well as those who have enough. Apple encourages direct service ministries to go beyond giving things *to* people and encourages us to create community; however, he does not ask whether real community is created when the goal is for the people who need material resources to change their lives. Sara Miles suggests that community grows out of working together more than out of eating together, although eating together provides a glue. None of the three books directly address classism or oppression, although Christian Robinson's illustrations in *Last Stop on Market Street* capture the diversity of urban life as the natural order of things.

One goal of my research was to find programs where people of different backgrounds eat together. In light of David Apple's program, I looked for ministries where people are eating together with openness to both parties being changed. I sought out places that encourage mutuality in relationship building. I wanted programs where people with and without food security volunteer. I was looking for whether (as Sara Miles described) the people who volunteer feel authority in their role. Does being a volunteer increase the sense of belonging? Miles describes the community that is formed. For my research, I looked for signs that people identify themselves as members of the community, that they feel like full members, and that they feel respected for the gifts they bring. I also looked for whether people working together recognize the systemic foundations of class differences.

Research Design

What happens when a church chooses to engage in shared food ministry? This project includes an aesthetic study of four programs that have the goal of shared ministry. An aesthetic study is descriptive rather than deductive or inductive and it uses observation and interviews to develop a rich portrayal of the subject. To do this, I did introductory phone interviews or visits of key informants at many sites and then chose four sites to visit. My plan was to engage in observations, interviews, and to use a questionnaire with volunteers at each site, and to use the results of that information to depict what shared ministry looks like. While on site I looked for, and described, what I saw happening, what relationships were being developed, or not, and what strategies the program participants use to build their shared ministry and/or shared leadership. The challenge, for me, is to see what is really happening, not what my thesis suggests should be happening; therefore, I tried to be attentive to what was *not* working as well as what *was* working as I engaged in the observations and interviews. The goal was to observe shared direct service food ministry as it happened. Prior to my study, I applied for and was given an exemption through the Texas Christian University Institutional Review Board (IRB) process.

Research Questions

My research was intended to show people with and without food security working together, and creating relationships across class boundaries. I was also interested in whether the group of volunteers as a whole had a sense of belonging to the church and to the church's food ministry. I imagined that it would be straightforward to observe whether people with and without food insecurity were engaging with one another, in reality as an outsider I could not tell which person is food insecure, and which is not. On the other hand, what I expected to be more complicated, whether the volunteers feel like they *belong* to the program more than that they are

visitors or guests, turned out to be clear. Volunteers demonstrated their ownership by using language, by the way they welcomed new people, including me, into the space, and with their description of the “their” part of the program. During the interviews and in the questionnaire I asked whether volunteers have friends at the program, were respected for their work, if some had authority or sense that they are leaders for some piece of the program. At the same time, as a participant observer, I tried to notice how the meal, pantry, and garden actually worked as direct service ministry. As a participant observer I was listening for language of service similar to that in Matthew 25, for volunteers to use language of community that would reflect on Acts 6, and for experiences of rejoicing as described by Letty Russell. Although it is my theory that creating such community will lead to individual conscientization and solidarity, I did not develop interview questions specifically to address those questions.

Site Selection

To choose sites to observe I asked colleagues and friends for recommendations, using Facebook and face-to-face meetings. My goal was to develop a list of ten sites that had shared ministry. For the most part, my initial recommendations came from clergy engaged in outdoor church ministries. I made two trips during the site selection phase, to Dallas and to Marquette, Michigan, and four sites were recommended by clergy in the cities I was visiting. During the interviews with each site I used chain sampling,²⁸ asking each program to refer me to others that might meet my criteria. In the end, I had a list of twenty ministries to choose from, although it turned out that most of these twenty were shared ministry by the criteria of this project.

I then did short interviews with each of those sites, mostly by phone, but I did make a few visits to these suggested sites in the selection phase. The interview questions are included in

²⁸ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, Eugene OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011, 85.

Appendix A. This was purposive sampling²⁹ (that is, not a random selection, but intentionally seeking programs that meet the criteria of demonstrating shared ministry). In the interviews, it became clear that there are many programs where people are treated as guests, or treated with dignity, or where the program leaders believe their ministry is incorporating people who are food insecure in new ways—but I found very few where the people who are food insecure are invited to be volunteers.

Using data from the interviews and visits, I chose four sites for study. My selection criteria included that the programs are church-affiliated food programs, a meal, food pantry, or garden, in the continental U.S. I wanted volunteers who were food insecure to have a regular presence in at least one aspect of the work of the program, preferably more, and for them truly to be volunteers, not meeting the obligations of a work requirement. I hoped for a sample set that would encompass diversity in denomination, racial/ethnic makeup of the congregation, and food program type (including at least one meal program, one food pantry, and one garden). In addition I needed a significant proportion of the participants of the program to speak English or American Sign Language, or to have interpreters readily available. I asked every site if they could imagine five or six volunteers who would be willing to be interviewed, with at least half of those identifying as food secure, and half as food insecure. In the end I chose four sites, including two pantries, one meal program, and one garden. Two were Episcopal (Trinity Memorial in Philadelphia, PA and St. Stephen's in Portland, OR) and two were United Methodist (Church for All People in Columbus, OH and Acton United Methodist Church, in Granbury, TX). Church for All People was majority African American and all the others were majority white, although St.

²⁹ Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 83.

Stephen's had a significant Asian American presence. My initial interviews did not reveal if these four sites would provide robust examples of shared ministry.

Data Collection

Each site identified a key informant who helped with travel planning and provided an overview of the program and how it engages, or does not engage, in shared ministry. I imagined that the key informant would also guide me by identifying five or six appropriate volunteers to be interviewed, the goal was that half be food insecure and half food secure. The key informant and volunteer interview questions are included in Appendix A. I also used a questionnaire with the volunteers interviewed. In addition to interviews I planned to engage the program as a participant observer,³⁰ eating meals, serving food, setting up and handing out food at the pantries, harvesting and mulching at the garden, and doing a lot of clean up everywhere. I imagined I would take short breaks as I observed so that I could write up notes of what I had seen.

Because of timing issues, the key informant interviews were not the first interviews I conducted, and therefore I did not have background information before I did volunteer interviews. For the most part, the key informants found volunteers for interviewing, some food secure and some food insecure, who were present on a regular basis, although there were only a few food secure volunteers at most of the sites. Because the volunteers wanted to work while present, and then departed as soon as the program was over, in some locations I completed the six interviews, but not as much time observing the ministry, and in others I spent more time observing but did not complete six interviews. While I visited each program for at least two days, the programs were quite different on each day, and two days was not fully sufficient time for participant observation and interviews.

³⁰ Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction*, Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2008, 70.

For interviews I shared the nature of my research and asked for consent to proceed with my questions. Although my research was found exempt from IRB standards, I used the Texas Christian University Consent form and explained it to those being interviewed before proceeding. I asked participants to tell me if they wanted me to use their real name or an alternative name that either they chose or I assigned. All participants were reassured that the study is completely voluntary and that they could at stop at any time or refuse to answer specific questions. One person asked me to destroy their information after the interview and I did. The consent form was the same for the key informant and volunteers and is in Appendix B.

For the key informant and the volunteers I started with grand Tour³¹ questions that provided an overview, guided tour questions that pointed out details of the program, and then task questions which were specific to the volunteer to being interviewed.³² I followed up with questions about each volunteer's feelings in response to their experience at the program.³³ I asked the key informant how the program came to be done as shared ministry, and what strengths and challenges they have noticed. The questions got at the mechanical puzzle³⁴ of how the ministry works, with a little about how actual tasks are completed but mostly how people interact with each other, and how people with few food resources are incorporated into the ministry. The volunteer interview questions started with finding out what role they have as volunteers, and then asked how well they know other volunteers, and which ones, who they talk to, and their impression of the work of others. Although my interview questions presumed that the ministry had changed to be shared ministry, several of the programs have been shared

³¹ Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 86.

³² *Ibid.*, 87.

³³ *Ibid.*, 88.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

ministry from the start. I asked the questions as written, and then expanded or adjusted them to fit the circumstance I was seeing. A challenge was that the question asking people what they did for the ministry led to many detailed descriptions of *how* to do a particular task, and volunteers were reticent to answer the feeling questions and those that asked for critique of other volunteers. I ended each interview with the written questionnaire, which is in Appendix A.

The goal of the written questionnaire was to gather demographic information of the volunteer interviewees, in particular whether or not each person is food insecure or not, but also race, age, and employment. Scaled questions³⁵ asked volunteers to identify their sense of being included and appreciated on a scale of one to five. My idea was that this would let me compare the responses of food secure and food insecure volunteers in terms of their sense of belonging and being appreciated for contributing their gifts in the program. Ammerman notes that questionnaire results do not provide depth and should not override what is seen through actual observation.³⁶ However the problems with the questionnaire I developed were larger than that—volunteers found the questions confusing, did not understand the scale, and the question on food security was simply not useful. Food secure people identified how they appreciated receiving food, and people without access to food insisted that they did not need the food program because there were so many others. During the interview I asked question seven from the questionnaire (“what else do you want to tell me?”) so I could take notes.

Moschella suggests that mechanical puzzles call for participant observation.³⁷ Participant observation requires being engaged in the program, alongside those who take part regularly.³⁸

³⁵ Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 114.

³⁶ Nancy Ammerman, Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley, and William McKinney, *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998, 100.

³⁷ Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice*, 68.

The challenge of participant observation is that it allows for either depth of a very small area, or breadth of observation of the entire program. Moschella notes that “[t]he broader your study, the less time you will have to pursue each experience in detail.”³⁹ For broadness I hoped to observe the programs from set-up through cleanup, including behind the scenes kitchen prep and organizational spaces. While the volunteers often got lost in explaining to me the mechanics of one small part of the program, most of the results were what I anticipated: a broad, not very deep, descriptive study. I used a process frame, observing how relationship building is working within the systems of the program.⁴⁰ Attention to process includes “the underlying flow and dynamics”⁴¹ observed while participating, and from the underlying strengths and weaknesses volunteers mentioned in the interviews.

My goal was to observe the systems in place that allowed food insecure people to volunteer, and to notice who volunteers interact with, and the style of interactions. For example I looked for whether directions were given as commands or conversations, how people interacted socially, and how individual volunteers were engaged or not engaged with others. I could see these things in a broad way, for the community, but there were difficulties understanding whether specific interactions were crossing boundaries of class because of the limited times of my visit and the fact that there were not clear markers identifying who was food secure or food insecure. The overall impression of whether boundary crossing was encouraged or permitted, however, was clear in most instances.

³⁸ Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice*, 70.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 17.

⁴¹ Ammerman et al, *Studying Congregations*, 15.

I engaged socially with both the volunteers and those coming to receive services, letting them know that I was doing a study, and asking them about their experiences with the program; this was easier at meals than at the pantries or garden. For my observations of the program I was looking for physical demonstration of connection, compassion, and knowledge of one another. Signs of this included how much personal space people leave, how often they interact with other volunteers and food program participants, whether there is appropriately intimate touching (such as a hand on the shoulder, platonic hugs, etc.), whether there is equality in asking for help from one another and where people stand in relation to others. Still, I was able to notice volunteers acknowledging one another's skills, and could hear comments about other's lack of skills, and I saw instances when volunteers were left out of conversations, or especially included. I looked for groups of people hanging out together, and whether volunteers act as, and describe themselves as, leaders.

I took notes on my computer for both the observation and the interview and followed IRB protocols for getting permission, for protecting people's names and stories, and for protecting the data that I gathered. For people who could not read, I read the consent form to them and filed the form in my computer bag before proceeding. For interviews, I read the questions and typed the answers in a single document for each site, as they spoke to me, labeled with their preferred name. Almost all participants wanted their name or nickname used in the report. It was my plan to read back my notes after each interview, but it worked more effectively to read back after each question. An unexpected result of typing rather than recording the interviews is that I cleaned up people's language as I typed—I checked that I said what they meant, but I did not end up with many quotes of people because of my own editing. This also means that it is unclear where my editing influenced what the person speaking meant, despite their approval of my language. I also

sent a draft of my summary results to each program's key informant so they could correct inaccuracies or misunderstandings, and one requested changes which I have incorporated (the other three key informants did not reply). For the survey I gave volunteers a pen to circle the answers but most were confused by the wording so I ended up reading it aloud, and explaining all but the demographic questions. The written questionnaires were stored with the chosen names of the individuals and grouped by site. I wrote my observations about each activity when there was a break, and reviewed it and added additional notes at the end of each program day. As I traveled home from each site visit, I wrote stream of consciousness reactions to the entire experience as a one to two page summary.

Research Results

After completing all the site visits, I looked more closely at the interviews, questionnaires, and my program notes to look for similarities and differences that demonstrate what happens in shared ministry. In the data from the interviews I was looking for the “implied or inferred meanings”⁴² about their experience, for example ways they communicated a sense of belonging, or a feeling of authority, more than the specific details of their volunteer work. I looked for how people worked together as community, and how the ministry worked to provide the food it intended to provide. While the details of each person's story are interesting, my goal was to interpret from those stories whether volunteers are connected to one another. Because I have worked in this field, my work cannot help but be interpreted “reflexively”—my own comments and influence affects both what people tell me, and what I hear from what they say. “In reflexive reading, your responses become one of the subjects of your research.”⁴³ My notes

⁴² Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice*, 172.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 173.

about what I saw, and how I felt about what I saw are influenced by my own experiences with shared ministry and by my interest in arguing in favor of shared ministry.

My research findings acknowledge my personal response, and include that in my description of what is happening. Moschella says “[t]he practice of reflexivity in ethnography involves the use of the self as a medium through which knowledge about the research partners and their religious practices can be gained.”⁴⁴ While this project did not allow enough time to create an ethnographic study, I did note any incidents, comments, sights, sounds or smells that “push my buttons” in ways that may influence my interpretation of the experience.⁴⁵ As someone who has led a program with shared ministry, initially I worried about comparing programs rather than observing what is happening in the moment. In reality, there was enough work to do, and each program was different enough that I focused on learning each particular program in the moment.

My research methodology was aesthetic and designed to make space for an overall picture of the ministry. While I was looking for small signs of successful shared ministry—did people feel loved, did people feel included, did people get to use their gifts, did people build relationships across the boundaries of food security—the primary purpose is description. Essentially, the results of this study identified whether or not shared ministry was actually occurring at each site, how the volunteers felt incorporated into the ministry, and offers a description of shared ministry where it occurred. I asked questions on belonging and being appreciated for their gifts, and the answers to these questions are interesting as part of the description, but this was not a robust analysis of whether shared ministry created, or even

⁴⁴ Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice*, 104.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 107.

influenced, the feelings. This project does not allow for comparison of shared ministry to any other direct service ministry. The final results, described in the next chapter, are descriptive examples of shared ministry.

Conclusion to Chapter Five

My research project was designed to provide descriptions of four shared ministry sites, developed by reflecting on my observations, interviews, and volunteer responses to a questionnaire at those sites. All of this was interpreted through the lens of shared ministry, describing a community where food secure and food insecure people were eating together and sharing the work of church-based direct service ministry. The next chapter will describe the four site visits to places where shared ministry was taking place.

CHAPTER SIX: RESEARCH RESULTS

In addition to arguments about why direct service food ministries should use shared ministry, this project includes research to describe shared ministries at work. In particular, the research aims to show people with food insecurity contributing volunteer skills to food ministries and to analyze the affects of people working together across class boundaries. As part of the research, I talked to twenty-one different food ministries and selected four sites for visits. Despite problems with the questionnaire and very short visits to each sites, I saw interesting and compelling signs of shared ministry. At all the sites the intention was for food secure and food insecure volunteers to eat together or receive food together, and at most sites a significant number of people who volunteered were food insecure. The four sites were all aiming to create a sense of community and belonging in addition to providing access to food.

Site Selection

I started by visiting or phone interviewing food ministries, asking them if their ministry was shared with people are food insecure. It was clear right away that most of those I interviewed did not understand what I was asking for so I adjusted my interviews by asking if they had people who used the program who also volunteered at the program. If the answer was yes to that I pressed further and asked if, as I visited, it would be possible to interview five or six volunteers and have half of the interviews with food secure and half with food insecure people. I was able to visit three different programs in Escanaba, Michigan, three in Granbury, Texas, and one in Boston, Massachusetts. I did phone interviews for the remainder. I asked each of those

interviewed to refer me to additional sites. In the end, I spoke with 21 ministries including 14 meals programs, four food pantries, and three gardens, but found few with shared ministry. A complete list of the programs is in Appendix C.

I initially interviewed 21 sites. Of the sites I did not select, a few stand out. Because I have used his book *Not Just A Soup Kitchen* in my project, it was interesting to interview David Apple at Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. While he had three or four volunteers who were once food insecure, and are now church members, he could not imagine inviting people who are presently food insecure to be volunteers. He said: “these people are so broken.” Also interesting was “Feeding our Friends” at First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Granbury, Texas. Because they are located in a wealthier section of a rural town, and transportation resources are limited, they began by delivering meals from their cars in a poorer neighborhood. As they got to know the people they were serving the church members started asking about the best way to distribute the meals. The people receiving the food eventually asked for the food to be delivered to the locally run community center, and the people who needed the food would then take over handing out the meals. Presently two or three food secure volunteers put together frozen meals and deliver them to the community center, leaving before the distribution by food insecure volunteers. Thus, they were “sharing” the workload, but not in a way that created relationships between the food secure and food insecure volunteers. Also interesting was one of the meals in Escanaba, Michigan, where the key informant informed me that food insecure people are not allowed to volunteer in any of their programs. As I was about to leave, I was introduced to a woman who volunteers through their training program for people with physical and mental disabilities. They were celebrating her last day as a volunteer because she has qualified for a paid position at a nearby business that is part of the same program. She

noted after leaving she will continue to see her volunteer friends when she eats at their meal program. It is possible the key informant does not think of the people with disabilities as food insecure, but on further questioning it turns out that several of the program's volunteers use the meals program to stretch their limited budgets. I did not chose these sites for further research, nor the two sites that required individuals to join the church to volunteer, nor two sites in Boston and Worcester, MA where I know many of the participants.

I expected to choose between many places with shared ministry. Instead it was rare to find a place with three food insecure volunteers, and the places I did choose were uncertain as to whether I would find three food *secure* volunteers to interview. I had hoped to find church affiliated programs with volunteers who I could interview in English, ASL or through an interpreter, from a variety of denominations, with a variety of racial and ethnic identities, and for that to work out to at least one meal program, pantry, and garden. While I did find one meal program, two pantries, and one garden for further research, the programs are mostly white, and half Episcopal and half United Methodist. My experiences during the site selection stage of this project may be illustrative of the fact that shared ministry is not a common approach to food ministries. I met the leaders of all of the sites, except for Project-44, through Ecclesia Ministries, the network of churches reaching homeless and at risk adults. One important value of Ecclesia network churches is developing programming by starting with what people who need material resources ask for. Worcester Fellowship, where I have worked, is a member of that network.

From the 21 programs vetted, I chose four ministries for site visits and interviews. Trinity Memorial Church, Episcopal, in Philadelphia has a creative program called Chat and Chew where homeless women cook a meal for themselves as a community building experience, but there are few food secure volunteers working with the women. Sanctuary Angels is a separate

direct service meals program, cooked and served by members of Trinity Memorial, but serves many of the same women. While I was told that Chat and Chew did not have three food secure volunteers, I chose Trinity Memorial because it seemed that Sanctuary Angels and Chat and Chew might be evaluated as a single shared ministry. St. Stephen's Episcopal Parish in Portland, Oregon, similarly has two programs that contrast with each other: Clay Street Table food pantry and Chili Lunch. The key informant was not certain I would find enough food secure volunteers to interview from the food pantry, or food insecure volunteers at the meal, so I scheduled my visit to observe both programs. Fresh Market food pantry at Church For All People in Columbus, Ohio fit my criteria well in that this United Methodist Church is racially mixed, and includes food secure and food insecure volunteers in many of their ministries, but again the key informant was concerned that there might not be three food secure volunteers specifically at the food pantry. My fourth site, Project-44, a community garden in Granbury, Texas, has food secure and food insecure volunteers, but not necessarily in the spring, when the work is planting rather than harvesting. The ministry also is only loosely connected to its sponsoring Acton United Methodist Church. Although the key informants at all four sites were eager for me to come and proud to show off, I was surprised that I found so few shared ministries to choose between.

At each site my goal was to do a key informant interview, six volunteer interviews, and to end each volunteer interview with a questionnaire. At the same time I planned to be a participant observer, helping with the ministry while observing and engaging with volunteers and recipients of the programs. After reflecting on the experience of the visits, I am analyzing that some of the differences between the programs are a function of the length of time they have engaged in shared ministry. Project-44's garden is just getting started with building relationships with food insecure people in order to welcome them as volunteers. While it is the newest example of

attempting shared ministry, due to problems with my research that site report appears last. The others presented in order from newest to longest running experience with shared ministry. The first section below covers the new Chat and Chew ministry, and the ongoing Sanctuary Angels meal at Trinity Memorial Church in Philadelphia. Although Chat and Chew gives the food insecure people the most authority over the menu and food prep, compared to others in my study, the participants saw it as feeding themselves rather than providing a direct service food ministry. The second section describes St. Stephen's Clay Street Table food pantry where the volunteers have worked out some of the initial organizing questions and have developed what is clearly shared direct service ministry. Those who volunteer have a sense of belonging to the ministry and a sense of authority to serve others. Although the leaders of Chili Lunch did not allow food insecure volunteers, it provided an interesting companion study to the shared food pantry. The third section discusses Fresh Market food pantry at Church for All People where their long history of shared ministry has led to some community organizing and systems change which grows out of the participants work as volunteers. Church for All People has created all of its programming using Asset Based Community Development. They start with the strengths, skills, and desires of the people who need services.

On the following page, Chart 6.1 offers summary information about the four sites. This chapter offers an introduction to each site, followed by reports on key informant interviews, descriptions of my observations as a participant, summaries of volunteer interviews, and the results of the questionnaires. At the end of each site report, I offer some learnings about shared ministry from that site. The chapter concludes with a critique of the research methods and summary of the overall learnings about shared ministry. Conclusions from the research are explored in Chapter Seven.

Chart 6.1 Summary Of Selected Sites

City Dates of visit	Church Name Denomination Church Size/Diversity	Key Informant	Programs	Other Significant People
Philadelphia PA March 13-15, 2016	Trinity Memorial Church Episcopal 30-40 ASA mostly white <i>In Collaboration with</i> The Welcome Church Ecclesia Ministries/Lutheran	Donna Maree Rector	Chat and Chew women cook meal Sanctuary Angels women served meal	Schaunel Steinnagel Pastor, The Welcome Church, Ecclesia Ministries
Portland OR April 26-28, 2016	St. Stephen's Church Episcopal 15-25 ASA mostly white some Asian American	John Paul Davis Outreach Minister of St. Stephen's and Director of Clay Street Table	Chili Lunch Meal program Clay Street Table Food Pantry	Stephanie Food Pantry Director
Columbus OH March 1-2, 2016	Church for All People United Methodist 200 ASA, racially mixed	Greg Henneman Church & Community Worker, and Healthy Eating and Living (H.E.A.L.) Director	Fresh Market Food Pantry	Miss. L. Fresh Market Director John Edgar Founder and Executive Director
Granbury TX May 14-15, 2016	Acton United Methodist Unknown	Jennifer Sterling Community Builder	Project-44 Garden	Margret Fields Pastor of Outreach at Acton UMC

Chat and Chew and Sanctuary Angels at Trinity Memorial Church in Philadelphia, PA

Trinity Memorial Church in Philadelphia is a small majority-white Episcopal congregation with some racial diversity. They have four affiliated non-profits that give the congregational leadership flexibility for creating missions that help keep their connection to the local community. Chat and Chew grew out of Trinity Memorial's connection to a women's homeless shelter and their work with The Welcome Church. The monthly meal was created because women who were staying at the shelter said they would like an opportunity to cook together. The goal of Chat and Chew is to create an environment for the people who need a meal program to be in community with one another. The Welcome Church, which collaborates on Chat and Chew, is an outdoor church affiliated with the Lutheran Church (ELCA) and part of the Ecclesia Ministries network, reaching adults who are homeless or at risk for homelessness with worship and community building. Trinity Memorial already had a weekly meal, Sanctuary Angels, cooked by food secure members of the congregation for women with food insecurity. Sanctuary Angels includes a spirituality and art program after the meal. Chat and Chew was meant to supplement Sanctuary Angels by providing an opportunity for women without homes to cook for themselves. For this visit, I chose a week when both the monthly and weekly meals were scheduled, and when I could come early to visit Trinity Memorial's Sunday worship.

The Sanctuary Angels name comes from tall paintings of angels in the sanctuary that miraculously survived the 1994 lightning strike and fire that destroyed Trinity Memorial's sanctuary. A second lightning strike went through the center of a recovery meeting in the church basement several years ago, and a third strike, fairly recently, hit another neighborhood building. The third strike happened while women at the Sanctuary Angels program were making angel art from large paper clips. A firefighter interrupted the group to notify them of the nearby fire and

ask if neighbors who had been evacuated could come into the sanctuary until it was safe to return to their homes. Donna, the rector, turned to the women eating and asked if this was fine with them. The women agreed and the space was opened up as a short-term shelter for middle-class people displaced by the fire. The women who were there to eat, all of whom were food insecure, stayed late into the night visiting with, and making angels for, the short-term refugees. I was told portions of this story by many women who came to eat at Sanctuary Angels, and by many women who came to cook at Chat and Chew. This opportunity to serve others began discussion of things they could do for one another, and eventually to the creation of Chat and Chew.

Trinity Memorial Church-Primary Informant Interview

The Rev. Donna Maree¹ is a white, middle-aged woman, Rector of Trinity Memorial for about two years. She tells me that the small congregation can support a full-time rector because the first fire prompted generous donations from the neighborhood that were used to reconstruct the sanctuary and to create several non-profits. She described her challenge as getting the congregation to focus more on creating *church* and less on the social service. She is not opposed to providing services, but her primary interest is creating community with people who need services. With that in mind she has developed Trinity Memorial's collaborative relationship with The Welcome Church as a model of how support services and church are one concept, rather than a mission projects as distinct from church. Donna's passion is creating community, so Chat and Chew, with its focus on community building, was a logical program for her to start. She described how she and the staff at The Welcome Church hand out invitations at Welcome church gatherings in the two days before the next scheduled Chat and Chew meal. She reported that women tend to respond right away, so the twelve slots are filled quickly, but they still are able to

¹All key informants gave permission to use their full names.

invite a few new women each time. Donna says that sometimes food secure volunteers have tried to take work away from the women and lean more about treating the women as guests, but she has been successful at guiding them toward more of a sharing experience. She noted that some of the participants at Chat and Chew do not get along with each other, but keeping the table setters working in one room, and the cooks in another, it is easy for them to keep a helpful distance. They eat at a long table, which also helps women to choose to stay apart from each other. Chat and Chew generally runs smoothly, she reports, with each person doing what they choose to do, although she noted that many do not want to do cleanup, and for Thanksgiving the meal ran well past the 8:00 p.m. end time. Signs of successful creation of community include the fact that the women share the work and the food and then take leftovers without arguing over who gets what.

Donna notes that some food secure cooks for Sanctuary Angels do not understand the relational goals of the ministry and say things could be understood as demeaning, or that might imply that the women are not capable of cooking for themselves, even though many are the same women who cook at Chat and Chew. She has worked hard to help the food secure volunteers see the people who come to eat in new ways and feels that their changing perspectives are one of the successes of the programs. I was not able to interview Donna until about halfway through my visit, but because Donna took me to several other food ministries at nearby churches she was able to introduce me to participants of Chat and Chew and Sanctuary Angels before they came for dinner.

Trinity Memorial Church-Participant Observation

Trinity Memorial is a large building on the corner of a pleasant neighborhood, just outside the historic district. The building is stone and somewhat formidable, but the red doors are wide-open Sunday morning when I arrived to preach. Sixty chairs were set in a circle around a

center altar. The space was expansive, with room for hundreds, but set so that the small congregation feels just the right size. Candles, a prayer wall, and warm coloring make the space feel welcoming and comfortable. The paintings of angels are central to the space. After preaching, I met several of the church member volunteers over coffee hour.

Sunday and Monday afternoon I visited two other nearby programs for homeless adults and then Monday evening joined Donna and Schaunel², who is paid staff from the Welcome Church, for interviews. Afterward I joined them at Chat and Chew. Chat and Chew runs from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. as a shared cooking experience for eight to twelve invitees, most of whom are homeless, all of whom are food insecure. The program is a joint ministry of Trinity Memorial and the Welcome Church. A few of the invited women arrived earlier than the announced 6:00 p.m. start time. Donna described feeling anxious about the long-term implications of letting women in early, but then let them in, and most of the group arrived in the next few minutes. We were making an Irish meal. Donna started the crock-pot for the corned beef and cabbage earlier in the day. Bags of vegetables, pudding mix, and beverages overflowed the tiny kitchen counter. Donna pointed out foods that needed prep, asked for volunteers to take on various tasks, and began boiling water for potatoes. The women were eager to be helpful but not quick to notice what needed to be done. Schaunel began cutting up the fruit as she visited with Sandra, one of the invitees who was making pudding. Neither noticed that other women had no tasks, nor invited them to help. Rachel, a food secure volunteer who runs the art program at Sanctuary Angels, and is often at Chat and Chew, arrived late with partially completed homemade dessert balls. She set up the work flow so that volunteers could make the mixture into balls and roll them

² Names of people who did not sign a release are changed. All people who were interviewed signed a release and either had me use their real name or chose another name. I have not identified which names are changed and which are people's real names.

in cinnamon, but did not ask other women to help her. The kitchen was busy with work, and noisy with pleasant chatter, two people here, three people there. The space is tiny and so each person had to tap a shoulder to get someone to move if they wanted to use the sink, or find a knife, or get a cutting board. All of the people with food security were working, and many food-insecure women were working. Everyone in the kitchen was engaged in conversation. The chaos and crowdedness made it difficult for anyone who was not self-assured to find a job to do. At the same time a couple of the invited women used that space to declare with authority that this is the correct way to make pudding, or tea, or to cut the bread. Donna looked for tasks to help less forceful women to get involved, but she was the only person who took on that role.

In the parlor another set of women were making sure the table was set and the serving buffet was ready. A woman with flatware on her walker seat explained to me that her disability made it so setting the table was her only task and she worked steadily at that while we talked. Another woman went between the kitchen and parlor making iced tea, coffee, and hot tea. A woman sat by herself in the corner and another slept. I asked for, and received, a few people to do interviews. When I returned the two long tables were set for the eight invitees, three leaders (Donna, Schaunel, Rachel), and me, with room for rolling bags, suitcases, and backpacks between us and the food was on the buffet behind us. One woman arrived just in time to eat.

Once dinner was ready and the table was set we stood for grace and then served ourselves from the buffet. Donna sat in the middle and kept up conversation with the people around her, sometimes telling stories she wanted me to hear, other times asking folk about their days. Some women did not talk. The ones who did responded with stories of their day, but did not reciprocate with questions of Donna. Two women were interested in the fact that I was from Boston and shared stories of people they knew there. Donna reminded the women of the

lightning strike in the neighborhood and the women proudly filled in the story with how they had been making angels that night, and how they stayed late into the night making angels for the displaced. A woman searched through her belongings and found one of the angels to show me.

Cleanup went more smoothly than Donna had described earlier, although the four food secure people did a large share of the work. Most of the women helped carry dirty dishes to the kitchen but only a few helped clean, and people had to be instructed to wash the table, fold the tablecloths, where to put clean dishes, and more. This need of direction seemed more connected to not knowing where things went, and the crowded kitchen space, than to unwillingness to help. While a few of the women left right away, several lingered, finding little volunteer tasks to do, or conversations to start. It felt to me like they were hanging out more for the community than for protection from the cold, and we ran past the scheduled 8:00 p.m. departure time.

Tuesday I returned to visit other afternoon programs and then Sanctuary Angels, which was held in the corner of the church sanctuary. Rachel, Schaunel, Donna, and I ate with the women. An additional man and woman, members of Trinity Memorial, did all the cooking but did not eat with us. The dinner table was set up when I arrived, a large horseshoe, everyone sitting at an outside edge, looking at each other. The women who came to eat were many of the same ones from the previous evening, but there were a few others, and a few were missing, for a total closer to fifteen. They had rolling bags, backpacks, and personal shopping carts, and a baby in a stroller pushed by her mom, yet there was still a sense of spaciousness. Most significantly, the sanctuary is far from the kitchen and the space was very quiet, and when people talked, they tended to talk quietly. I had interviewed both cooks earlier, but only one interacts with the women at all; this one rolled up a cart with food and a cart with drinks. She was pleasant and welcoming as she described our delightful meal (salmon!) and then went back to the kitchen as

we served ourselves. The women talked quietly to the people nearest them, giving lots of attention to the baby, and her mom, and occasionally sharing across the table. There was plenty of interaction between pairs and groups of three of the women and with the staff and volunteers. Despite being many of the same women as Chat and Chew, the need to be in separate spaces, and for some women to avoid others did not seem in play at this program.

After eating, Rachel led an art project and silent meditation. All of the women and leaders were actively involved. A few women needed help understanding how to do the art project, but everyone completed it by assisting one another. Some women produced more involved and creative artwork than the rest of us and we admired it together. It was with a sense of celebration that the group gathered for a photograph of the projects and then Rachel, Donna and I cleaned up the art project, with help from a few of the women, while most of the women packed up to leave. The end of evening discussions were about busses, cars, and carts, mostly logistics for getting back to the shelter, but a clear example of the women checking on each other.

Trinity Memorial Church-Volunteer Interviews

I had many conversations with volunteers, some at the other programs I visited, and five interviews: one with one of the Sanctuary Angel cooks, one with the artist for Sanctuary Angels who also came to Chat and Chew, and three with food insecure people who were invitees and cooks at Chat and Chew. All of the people interviewed were confused about which program belonged to which church, Trinity Memorial or The Welcome Church. Trinity Memorial members were confused between Trinity Memorial and its affiliated non-profits. When asked whether they felt like they belonged, several interviewees asked, “belong to what?”

Despite the confusion around what exactly they belonged to, there was definitely a strong sense of belonging. Many of the women knew each other before these programs started, but they also spoke of including new people into their circle. One of the volunteers with plenty of food was passionate about feeling that she belongs here. She spoke of the righteousness and rightness of the program: “the idea of combining food, art, silence, and community into a tapestry, it is amazing because it is a natural, organic experience. There is this nice rhythm to this.” It was clear the top reason for coming was the feeling of inclusion. A newer participant from Chat and Chew said, “it’s just wonderful to be part of it. It really gets us working together.” Two of the women mentioned the night they helped take care of the neighbors displaced by the lightning strike. It is my impression that the women may not belong to the church, or even to Chat and Chew, but part of the experience of cooking together is a sense of belonging to each other.

Many of the volunteers knew the names and stories of several of the other volunteers, and when asked about the skills of others they gave detailed analysis of which people were workers, and which were not, and added explanations of what might keep a woman from contributing fully. “Jane will be Jane,” one interviewee sighed. They all concluded that both meals work very well. Some did not see themselves as volunteers, but rather as “participants”, explaining that the way to participate in Chat and Chew is to cook and to eat and one of the people with food security used similar language. One participant interpreted my questions about volunteers to be about the staff of Trinity Memorial and the Welcome Church. Everyone interviewed appreciated that the program gave her a chance to help with the work. One added: “I’m willing to give my time, instead of money that I don’t have.” Another offered that it was a relief to be able to work, comparing it to church where “the worst thing is the offering when you can’t put something in.”

One person named that it was hard to live with chaos, mess, and waste of food that happened by trying to finish preparing, eating, and cleaning up a meal in a two-hour window.

Trinity Memorial Church-Questionnaires

I collected five questionnaires from those I interviewed. In terms of food security, one person noted that there are food programs throughout Philadelphia, so they do not need the food at this program. Although three of those interviewed live at a shelter, only one person said that without this program they would not be able to eat. The others said that the program stretched their food budget, or that they had plenty of food. The two programs included about one-third people of color, but all five interviewees were white. The lowest education listed was 12th grade, four people listed bachelor's degrees or some college. The age range was 34-53, although one woman identified her age as "gramma." For employment, respondents listed disability, retirement, surgery, and volunteering. One person wrote: "retired Robin Hood." Almost all selected choice five on the sliding scale selection, identifying that they were well known, loved, appreciated for their gifts, and friends with those present. On two questionnaires some of the choices were given a four instead of a five, but the rest marked a five on every scale of relationship creation, sense of belonging, and being appreciated for their work.

Trinity Memorial Church-Learnings

Neither Chat and Chew nor The Sanctuary Angels were created specifically to cross boundaries between people who need food and people who have enough. Chat and Chew grew out of Trinity Memorial's women's shelter, where women cook for themselves independently. The women noted that it would be good to be engaged more cooperatively and so the goal for Chat and Chew was to create community among the participants. The opportunity to help with the crisis of the fire during Sanctuary Angels appears to be the grounding for the sense of

community. For Chat and Chew, the only food secure people included were those interested in pastoral and artistic support positions, although they helped in the cooking and cleaning. The cooks for Sanctuary Angels did not interact with the eaters in more than a superficial way, yet there is no question that those who were food insecure felt deeply known at both food ministries. They were given personal invitations, so the leadership was inviting people they knew, even if the women invited did not know each other. The women with food insecurity felt especially known by the staff that run the programs. The volunteers who had enough resources were engaged in Chat and Chew order to get to know the homeless women, but at Sanctuary Angels the cooks' goals were to serve others and they were pleased with their ability to do that. Similar to what I will show at other site visits, the strategy of engaging in one participant observer experience was not enough to know if new relationships are built as a result of the time spent working together, but I could see that there were relationships present. There were women who traveled together, and women who trusted each other, women who had known each other for a long time, and several examples of women who made apologetic but appreciative explanations for another woman's isolation, separation, or outright inappropriate behaviors.

The biggest sense of belonging came from the story of the night that the women with food insecurity helped the neighborhood of food secure and housed people who were in a moment of trouble. The women felt appreciated, recognized, even honored by the way they had stepped up to be present for others, and they appreciated that this program, *their program*, had done that. A few clearly felt a sense of authority in deciding how some part of the program should be handled, whether it was how to make pudding or coffee, or how to set-up the buffet. While I have argued that it takes being welcomed as a volunteer to feel true ownership of a ministry, the women clearly felt ownership of Sanctuary Angels. Perhaps that ownership was

developed that night they were the volunteers, helping other people in need. It is possible the Chat and Chew program has increased their sense of ownership, but I cannot tell that from this study. It would be interesting to engage these women in a discussion of Matthew 25:31-46 and find out whether they identify as the people giving support to Christ in need, or if they identify as the people needing the support. Their repeated sharing of the fire story certainly makes me think of them as people who share with others what they can. The woman with the disability who insisted on taking authority for her role in setting the table also brought to mind the Hellenistic widows demanding a turn to serve others.

There was clearly a need for Donna's leadership to get the work done to make the meal. There was something of an "I'll do what I like" agreement for sharing the work of the meal. It should be noted that this is the only site I visited where it was presumed that all, or nearly all, of the participants would be working. Some participants who were food insecure did not step in to do the work unless they were explicitly invited to do it and others tentatively tried to help but did not have the ability to see what needed to be done. The invited women chose tasks they liked, and the people with enough food, Rachel, Donna, Schaunel, and me, filled in the other tasks. At the same time all of the women interviewed, those with and without food security, felt they brought significant skills to the ministry and that others recognized those skills.

The role of the key informant develops in interesting ways in this study. In some ways Donna, in this fairly new program, described filling two roles that we will see divided at the next two sites. She is in charge of the relationship building, as are the other key informants, but is also responsible for managing the details of the program, which at more experienced sites handled with a program director. The challenge of enforcing the rules such as when to come in, and when to leave, of managing the meal preparation, such as whether the potatoes getting washed, and

supervising the cleanup, at the same time as listening for important stories, connecting one woman to another, and taking time to sit with others is immense. Donna handled this with grace but it was a challenge. It would be interesting to study how the director's job description, the distribution of relationship building, and operations all impact the outcomes in shared ministry.

The difference between the efficiency, organization, noise, and chaos of the two meals could not have been more different. Sanctuary Angels is efficient, organized, low on waste, and quiet and calming for the women who came to eat. Chat and Chew is inefficient, disorganized, wasteful, and yet, even in the noise, was appreciated as a calming and refreshing break for those who were food insecure. Sanctuary Angels managed set-up, food preparation, and cleanup with two food secure volunteers. Chat and Chew involved twelve people, at various levels of involvement, for the same tasks. I felt that the time working together at Chat and Chew built a sense of authority that contributed to the strong sense of belonging to both Trinity Memorial programs.

Clay Street Table and Chili Lunch at St. Stephen's Parish in Portland, OR.

St. Stephen's Episcopal Parish in Portland, Oregon, is a small, primarily white congregation lead by part-time rector, The Rev. Dennis J. Parker. The congregation of St. Stephen's runs the Chili Lunch at their building. Clay Street Table runs the Food Pantry and is the umbrella for the many meals programs that are hosted at St. Stephen's but run by other organizations, which all together provide at least one meal each day. Some programs are focus on particular identity groups, one for young adults, one for Chinese people, one program cooks inside and brings the food out to homeless adults. Chili Lunch is available to anyone who wants it and the program is more than forty years old. The menu is always the same: chili, cornbread, salad, with milk, coffee, and tea to drink. The Food Pantry is one of the newest programs and

works with the Oregon Food Bank to provide meat, milk, canned and boxed goods once a month. I scheduled the visit to see both the Food Pantry and the Chili lunch but was able to see some other programs that meet at St. Stephen's as well

St. Stephen's-Primary Informant Interview

My key informant is The Rev. Dr. John Paul Davis, Outreach Minister of St. Stephen's and Director of Clay Street Table, an Ecclesia Ministries affiliate. He goes by Paul. Paul's passion is people, not food. He loves connecting people, and I saw him constantly finding one person and connecting them to another. He recognizes this as his gift and prioritizes it at all times. When asked about how it works to have a mix of food secure and food insecure people he says, "I love when it blurs and nobody knows." In my experience at the site the idea that "nobody knows" was exactly right: nobody knew, nor cared to know, each other's food security. The focus was always creating community. At the same time Paul was realistic about making sure the food pantry actually works for the people who need the food. For example, on pantry days there are snacks and drinks available in the sanctuary for people while they are waiting for their turn to shop the pantry. This is called "hospitality." He has found that he needs food secure people to be the leaders of hospitality. He told me that the only hospitality task food insecure people handle is handing out the random numbers that participants receive as they enter the waiting space in the sanctuary. (However I worked with people who are food insecure handing out snacks in the hospitality space.) In the main pantry, Paul said he has found it is better to have people who are not dependent on the food to be floating observers as people shop the pantry and food insecure people staff the food distribution tables. He noted there are many accusations of stealing, of taking too much, and many examples of people losing control of their anger when confronting others. His experience is that the food insecure people have anxiety about the food

and so it is harder for them to be neutral in dealing with the conflicts that come up. In addition to staffing the distribution tables, food insecure people do all the loading and unloading, cooking the shared lunch, and most of the cleanup.

The food pantry was suggested by a man who is food insecure and comes to one of the meals at the church. He noted that he does not really need a meal because he has a kitchen in his subsidized apartment next door. What he needs is groceries. Paul knew of Sara Miles' work in San Francisco, so he used that model to create shared ministry from the start. He says the ministry changes all the time: "It's just in my nature when people come in the door to invite them to change the program. So I did that naturally." Paul has found that the food ministries that were in place before he arrived, like Chili Lunch, have been resistant to sharing the work. Chili Lunch has softened its rules and restrictions but still does not let volunteers eat, nor does it allow people who eat to volunteer. He advised me to interview Coffee Bill, an old, white, food insecure veteran, who has keys to the building and has learned to manage the leaky coffee maker. Coffee Bill insisted that I use his name in this report. He took over coffee service for all the programs that meet at the church, and therefore became the only food insecure person who volunteers at Chili Lunch. True to Paul's personality, he connected me to Coffee Bill and asked him to do an interview the moment he walked in on Tuesday.

In addition to the challenge of changing existing ministries, Paul noted how hard he has worked to integrate the Chinese-speaking participants into the ministries. White and African American participants complain that the Chinese steal, that is, take more than the designated maximum of some items, and that they cut the line. His first Chinese volunteers were recruited accidentally: Paul told a line of people that only volunteers can come into the pantry early and fourteen Chinese people raised their hands to volunteer. Five of those are now regular volunteers.

He uses Google Translate, one bilingual volunteer, and a number of Chinese American children to smooth communication, but has found full integration is a huge challenge for the ministry.

Paul spoke passionately about creating community but noted that funders are looking for dramatic stories of volunteers later finding paid work. He emphasizes looking for small successes saying the ministry “deals with human size miracles.” He tries to notice, and to point out, that they actually did something significant today. It is an effort to take the miracles where you find them. “People want to be part of this,” he told me. “They want to be noticed for who they are. So sometimes the miracle is that someone was filled with joy at being noticed.”

St. Stephen's-Participant Observation

St. Stephen's is located in the midst of a mixed community, with affordable housing, including supportive housing for seniors and people with disabilities, and expensive luxury condominiums on opposite corners. Volunteers use a side entrance to the church, which opens to a shadowy space with a decrepit, narrow bathroom to the left, an office to the right and stairs to the social hall where most meals take place. The volunteer director of the pantry works out of the office, using a relatively new computer to order food from the food bank. The parish hall is worn, but welcoming. It is well lit and set up with long folding tables, folding chairs, and a few couches, all arranged in different configurations for each program.

Tuesday morning I started my observations with preparations for the weekly Chili Lunch, a longtime ministry of St. Stephen's started by Rita, an Asian American church member and the volunteer leader of the program. Although the volunteers at this program resist Paul's pressure to use people who are food insecure to help with the work, Coffee Bill rules the coffee, and apparently got that job at Chili Lunch by simply refusing to notice there was a rule against it. I learned later that one of the St. Stephen's Church members who volunteers at Chili Lunch is also

food insecure. When I arrived, two St. Stephen's members had the chili started and corn bread batter mixed. The large kitchen was crowded with things, an ancient gas stove and a huge steel island in the center and refrigerators, sinks, and counters around the edges. In the social hall, two St. Stephen Church's members sat making little bags of candy for participants to take with them. Other volunteers were setting the tables with plates, plastic flatware, flowers, and salt and pepper. Coffee Bill had already made coffee and was pouring it into pitchers for each table. Another volunteer poured milk into similar pitchers. There were eleven tables set for six each. A few people came in to see if they can help but most are outside waiting for the start. Paul reports that eaters know that there are not extra volunteer jobs for this meal.

Paul introduced me to a church member who comes regularly to volunteer, and he and I sat at one of the tables for the interview. Rita quickly suggested we move, and the volunteer firmly insisted we stay put. She began to pick up our plates, but I told her I was going to eat. I interpreted her reaction as surprise, sensing that she assumed we would not eat. During the interview participants came in, filled the seats, Paul led us in prayer, and chili and cornbread were served. One of the volunteers asked me to move my backpack that was in the way, and I slid it under my feet. Later I heard from Paul that they have a problem with bed bugs and packs are supposed to be on the outer walls of the space, which have been treated to resist the bugs.

The chili is notably better than any other food program chili I have ever had, more meat, and more flavor, and when they offered seconds it was another generous serving. All of the volunteers, including Rita, were intent on making sure every person got their fair share of food, noticing if a bowl was empty, or if someone had not been served, and checking back to be sure they had gotten what they requested. There were plentiful refills of milk and coffee, and the milk was surprisingly popular. At the start everyone who wanted to eat could find a seat, others

arrived intermittently and took seats as the first eaters left. One of the latecomers sat quietly at the end of my table and I was worried he would not get food, but the volunteers saw him, quickly brought him food, and later one of the volunteers sat with him to chat. After about 45 minutes, 165 bowls of chili had been served to about 80 people. When I left, cleanup volunteers were working around a few people sitting around visiting.

Clay Street Table has meals every day. While these did not qualify for my research because the people who are food insecure did not help serve the food, it was interesting to see how the participants overlapped and yet recognized the widely different rules and at each program. During one program, the men were encouraged to use the downstairs broken-down bathroom, while during another program that bathroom was off-limits, and during yet another program, use of any bathroom was timed. During one program the couches and hangout space were central, while during the next it was off limits. One person who had the run of the church, with keys to locked rooms, and authority to call people out for inappropriate behavior while the food pantry was happening, came to a particular meal where participants were not allowed in a certain room and he simply followed the rules of that program. I was reminded that the same people who are quiet and obedient, even subservient, in one situation may be a leader in a different circumstance.

The Thursday food pantry is once a month. Paul invited everyone he met to volunteer. People who are food secure and food insecure worked together picking up, organizing, and distributing food, and they cleaned up the church together afterward. The volunteers were served lunch which was prepped by other volunteers, and they shopped the pantry ahead of hundreds of other food recipients. The work began 8:00 a.m. Wednesday morning with a trip to the Oregon Food Bank to pick-up the food to distribute. Stephanie, a white middle-aged woman whom Paul

identifies as food insecure, is the volunteer director of the food pantry. She reserved us a rental van, and another food secure volunteer brought his car and two food insecure volunteers. Back at the church a group of six or eight volunteers were ready to unload. Resources designated for the day's meal programs were sorted and stored in the kitchen while pantry foods were carried to the basement. We finished around noon. When I arrived Thursday at 9:00 a.m. volunteers were already carrying the food back upstairs and, guided by Stephanie, onto the appropriate tables for distribution. Volunteers at each table organized the food at that station. Stephanie seemed to run many decisions by Paul; his response was to listen closely, but not to actually give advice or input. He basically asked clarifying questions and then agreed with her choices.

One wall was set up with canned goods, another fresh and frozen vegetables. Large camping coolers were set up for the meat, milk, and yogurt. Sally, a young white woman dressed in a cut-up tee shirt was organizing the "Street Table", this was food selected for people who do not have homes, flip top cans, pre-packaged meals, and prepared items. Paul connected us, making the point of noting that this program was her idea and that this food pantry was reaching new people because of her idea. While I interviewed Sally she poured dog food out of huge packages into plastic grocery bags to provide food for pets, another of her ideas.

Paul set-up a station for interviews in the hallway and soon I had a line of people waiting their turn. When I returned to the social hall a couple hours later the space had miraculously been transformed from sealed boxes full of mismatched items into an organized store with separate tables for canned goods, boxes of fresh food, a cooler for refrigerated items, piles of grains, and a line-up of condiments, and the food at each distribution table further sorted by size or type. A volunteer was touring the space with Stephanie. As Stephanie declared the limit on each item, he wrote that on a sign. Later a translator made Chinese signs for each food item. Paul began

gathering the group for the monthly photograph, but this month there was a special gift for Paul and Stephanie, a certificate of appreciation offered by the Chinese volunteers as a thanks to the ministry. Everyone was eager to be part of the celebration. There were probably forty volunteers, mostly white, some African American, and about seven Chinese, all working together to get the photograph just right. The volunteers then gathered for lunch, made by four or five kitchen volunteers while we set up the pantry. We prayed and were served, and gathered somewhat randomly around the room to eat. A group of eight or ten volunteers arrived as we were eating lunch, and I presumed that they were food secure and they were assigned to set up the altar in the sanctuary to provide hospitality for those waiting in line to shop the pantry. At 12:30 p.m. lunch was done and there was nervous energy about when volunteers could shop the pantry. Paul explained to me the schedule is hard to carry out: lunch at noon, shopping at one, open at two. Lunch is often late, and the lack of consistency makes the food insecure volunteers anxious.

At 12:45 p.m. all the volunteers who wanted to shop the pantry lined up in the hallway, were checked in, and began shopping. No one was staffing the tables since they are the people who will do that, but everyone is watching out for cheaters. Several shoppers explain to me that the problem is that the Chinese people take too much, and I watch as someone pulls a large candy bar out of a Chinese woman's hand, voices are raised, and the whole thing passes before Paul notices. The meat station is crowded and tense as people keep repeating that each person only gets one. Some carry their food home and return, others used the small locked chapel to store groceries, coats, and other belongings. After we finish shopping the pantry the volunteers divided so that mostly people with enough food were running hospitality, handing out numbers, and checking in shoppers in the sanctuary. It was mostly people who were food insecure managing the food distribution tables in the fellowship hall.

When the doors open for hospitality in the sanctuary, the line is four blocks long. A woman is ready at the door for check-in with a pitcher with numbers participants will draw as they enter, letting them know when they can shop. Several people tell her she needs additional numbers because the line is so long, and she adds them. This is completely different than Paul's idea that the first fifty people are drawing numbers 1-50, the second fifty numbers 51-100, etc. People trickle into the sanctuary, some find seats and others line up at the hospitality station to get coffee, juice, and cookies. More than three hundred eventually came in, about 30% people of color. The African Americans were mixed into the crowd, while ten to twenty Asian Americans hung out together in the back.

I was assigned to the hospitality station at the altar with two other volunteers, and Lisa, a white food secure woman in charge of hospitality, did not give us much direction. She was stepping in and out to get the station organized, so I was letting people get their own coffee, which turned out to be incorrect and a wet spot was left on the sanctuary carpet. Tess, a middle aged African American woman, was a regular shopper at the pantry, but that day was a new volunteer. She had a quiet, firm voice telling people take a napkin, three cookies, and one candy. That did not match what was there, a great deal of candy and a few packages of cookies, but it was clear and she was amazingly patient with people who took extra. She was especially concerned that they use a napkin to pick up the cookies, which were offered loose. Ross wanted to help. When he arrived, other volunteers went to get Paul to report that "one of the crazies" is here, and Paul brought him to the hospitality table. He and I were trying to figure out the job, when to refill items and where to get more juice or coffee. When Tess took a break Ross tried very hard to do the "only three cookies," but his flat voice sounded angry, and Lisa moved him back to refilling the supplies. He asked just before 2:00 p.m. if he got to shop, Paul took him to

get groceries, and he left after that. No one commented that he had effectively done one hour of volunteering in order to go first in line. At 2:00 p.m. a volunteer started calling out the numbers and people came up, showed their slip, and entered the pantry. He had an odd style, sometimes calling specifically for number six or twenty-eight, other times calling for everyone below a certain number. There were jokes that some probably would not get a turn until tomorrow, but at 2:30 p.m. number 45 shopped and more than three hundred came through by 4:30 p.m.

In the pantry, the first item was meat, which created a bottleneck, there were many choices, and people wanted to see them. The shopping proceeded slowly, but in a logical line through the room. Volunteers wearing gloves put vegetables into plastic bags. The signs giving the maximums were high on the wall behind the tables and it was not clear whether anyone read them. The volunteers at the tables had various levels of involvement, some informed people as they come as to what they can take, others just sat blankly at their station, still others were pushing their wares: “no, take three cans, you get three cans of beans.” Paul wandered around the space: moving people to fill gaps where volunteers were needed, solving arguments, and visiting with people, both volunteers and shoppers. Stephanie continually checked the remaining food, adjusted the amounts to hand out, and found better ways to organize stations. The last shoppers got their numbers around 3:15 p.m. and around 4:30 p.m. the last person went through the Pantry. Paul announced that people could go through again to get seconds. There was a scramble for the leftover meat, but even after everyone collected what they wanted many items remained.

Ralph, who I presumed was homeless earlier when I tossed empty cardboard boxes to him out the window of the church, was still breaking down boxes at 5:30 p.m. when I would hit my exhaustion point. He was working alone and I stepped outside to help get the last of the boxes into the four recycling bins. As we finished up, I learned that he is a retired white collar

professional who has adjusted his part-time job schedule so he can volunteer at the food pantry once a month. We broke down all the boxes, and picked up all the trash, swept and mopped the social hall by 6:30 p.m. Most of the volunteers left at 5:00 or 5:30 p.m., but a solid crew stayed through the end of cleanup, many had been there since before I arrived.

St. Stephen's-Volunteer Interviews

I did twenty interviews at St. Stephen's, in large part because Paul loved connecting people with me, and because volunteers wanted to please Paul. About half were volunteers from the food pantry the others were from other programs that meet at St. Stephen's. Almost all of my interviews were with people who are white, none were with people who are Chinese, and, while it is difficult to tell from the questionnaires, about half are people Paul identified as food insecure. Four were students or graduates of nearby Christian colleges, George Fox University and Warner Pacific College, one of whom had been homeless in the past. One was a doctor who found the church by attending a funeral and was impressed with the ministry so he joined the church and joined the Chili Lunch volunteers. One was a member of the vestry at St. Stephen's who I later learned was homeless. Another was a man that I thought was homeless but was middle class. Some described their jobs as distribution or stationing a table. Others ran parts of the program, and a few spent most of their interview instructing me on how to set-up a pantry. "Running a program" varied from simple tasks like being in charge of the canned goods to ordering all the food for the pantry. One man who identified himself as homeless, when asked what he does here, said that he cooks, cleans, and makes sure anything that may result in violence does not stay violent. And if it gets violent, he makes sure it is the aggressor that has to leave. Similar to Paul's comment on seeing small miracles, one volunteer noted that "we strive to do nothing special all the time."

One constant is that those interviewed described a sense of belonging to Clay Street Table and to St. Stephen's Parish in a variety of ways. Coffee Bill was explicit: "We know each other. We are family." Many others also used family language, or talked about the others as friends. When asked who they knew in the ministry, many listed another volunteer who had invited them, while others noted that they knew no one at the start and now feel they know almost everyone. One person said they felt their responsibility, as a volunteer, was to talk with people, to make friends, to share a meal. Another suggested that it is not really volunteering, but hanging out with friends. A person with food security noted that it changed the way he viewed people who do not have food. One man said it is like coming to my second home, noting that he lives by himself and volunteering gives him something to do. He said, "I think it's fun even if it's chaotic. I get most of my food supply here. I'm on a tight budget."

Many of the interviewees mentioned chaos and confusion. They also mentioned the challenge of fights, although they were quick to mention that it all ends well. "We have our spats and then a week goes by and it's ok." More than one person mentioned fights caused by taking too much food and fights started by joking with people who did not understand jokes. People noticed that Stephanie sets rules and Paul ignores them. Most sided with Stephanie, but one person noted that Paul is teaching them that if someone really insists on taking extra they must need it. Several people were distressed that shoppers at the food pantry take more than is allowed, but a few of the people who were upset also mentioned that they also get extra, but they get their extra by asking permission. Several people made an effort to understand how people living with poverty would want to hoard things, or might feel that this is a place it is easy to take extra. Others described how hard it is to say no to people who want more than their share. One woman described how another volunteer at her distribution table has tried to help her to "just let

it go” when people do things she identifies as wrong. Another noted that cooperation is hard, because everyone has their own opinions and compromise is not in some people’s vocabulary.

Despite the challenges with the program, most people described themselves and the others who volunteer as people with skills. Although one person said that people notice what needs to be done and do it, my observations while I participated, seemed to suggest the opposite. One person said that each person finds their niche, whether it is unloading a truck or organizing a freezer. While one volunteer said that most folk can do what they say they can do, several said that some volunteers are problems, that a few volunteers needed to be given different tasks, and specifically that some people who cook are not really chefs. The lunch for the pantry volunteers was not great that day. A few volunteers noted that one of the most important skills was listening to one another. Several mentioned that they had reorganized one part of the pantry into a better set-up and felt that they were treated as the authority in that area.

Everyone I interviewed described the experience of volunteering as positive. One person noted, “it’s such a wonderful thing to do because I’ve been homeless and I’ve been hungry,” and several said that it is good to give back. One said, “I wouldn’t have survived on the streets without other people’s help so this is my way to give back.” Others mentioned their disability or job loss and how volunteering fills time, but also gives meaning. Several people mentioned that it is important to help people, and they like that they can do that here, and one mentioned that he helps people because that is what God wants. Some felt they learned new skills as a volunteer and one added that she learned to appreciate people who help her more because of her work in this program. A person with enough food emphasized how people without food can learn responsibility by volunteering. Another with enough food focused on how much she likes the

people who come to eat: “Street culture is more direct and more honest, and that is what is valuable. They reach brokenness and rawness and beautiful humanity comes out.”

Students from George Fox University and Warner Pacific College brought up evangelism in their interviews. One was concerned that others were coming to the program to save people, and worried about other students’ ability to let the participants be experts of their own experiences. Another was concerned that volunteers universalize stories they hear, and need to volunteer for longer to get more stories and more depth. One said worship is fine, but coming to church just to get help is fine, too. He noted that this is what this church does; it shows the love of God and what Jesus really taught.

While my theory was that people who engage in shared ministry would be more aware, even perhaps more conscientized, to the systemic issues of poverty, I was still surprised when a food insecure volunteer described the systemic nature of poverty to me. He gave me a detailed history of public services in the United States since Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and then moved on to the challenge of jobs going overseas. He commented, “I’m helping here as a Band-Aid, but the federal government needs to create jobs to get people off the streets.” Although my theory of shared ministry suggested this might be one of the outcomes, he was the only one to describe anything about systemic causes of poverty. The interviews did point to the possibility that shared ministry made a significant contribution to volunteers concerns about racism. A number of people shared the challenge of treating the Chinese people differently than others, some using the word “oriental,” others “Asian,” while still others knew that this group is definitely Chinese. Volunteers commented that it was important to Paul. Many mentioned it only as a language issue. Most tried to make it clear that they understood that the ministry welcomes everyone, and that they should treat everyone equally, but they found that difficult. One man said, “people are

people, sometimes if they speak a different language it is hard to understand, but some people can't understand my accent because I'm from Missouri."

St. Stephen's-Questionnaires

Seventeen people from a variety of programs filled out questionnaires at this site. As at Trinity Memorial, the majority of questionnaires were from white volunteers. At St. Stephen's 13 of the 17 volunteer questionnaires were from white people. I had no interviews with the Chinese participants despite the fact that they were a significant minority in this program. Ages ranged from 20-77, but the majority were 40-50. At this site, I also had many people who were identified as homeless or food insecure by Paul, or by themselves, but marked themselves as having plenty of food. One person wrote in "there is more food in this city than fleas on a jack-rabbit." Seven people did identify as food insecure, saying the program stretches their budget. In evaluating their skills, two volunteers from the local college or university were the only ones to label themselves as perhaps not having skills for the program (they gave themselves a 3 out of 5). Five people, including those two, gave a 3 on the question of whether others recognized the skills they have, and one gave a 2. Two people ran down the list with fours instead of fives, one saying to me as they did it, "I don't give the top score." Yvonne, who gave the most varied responses to the questionnaire, was here for her first time as a volunteer. Although she was invited by a friend who lives in her building, she did not know many of the other volunteers and she commented that her responses demonstrate that.

St. Stephen's-Learnings

While the primary goal of this ministry is to create community, Paul is clear that he hopes the ministry will build relationships that cross the boundaries of people with and without food security. This ministry started because a person coming to eat said he needed a food pantry

instead. Compared to Trinity Memorial, the volunteering opportunity at St. Stephen's is explicitly the opportunity to serve *others*. The example of the volunteers at St. Stephen's is consistent with the story of the Hellenistic widows and the interpretation that they wanted a chance to serve others. Paul responded similarly to the early church leaders by trying to put people who are food insecure in charge of as much as possible. Paul did not mention a goal of inviting people to become members of St. Stephen's church community, but he, and the program, treated people who came to pick-up food as more like members than guests. St. Stephen's has people with and without food security in their congregation and in their leadership positions. Clay Street Table has some people working together with people with different food security. Because my research plan did not include extended visits over time, I cannot say for sure that shared ministry included creating friendships or deep relationships across that boundary. In this location I *felt* like that was happening, but while I saw people work together, I could not learn how deep the relationships were. There were many instances where people with enough food worked together at one task, while people without enough food worked together at a different task, and a large majority of the tasks were handled alone. Coffee Bill ran the coffee alone, and when he was encouraged to work with others he began training other food insecure people. At Trinity Memorial some of the challenge was that people were building relationships with the leaders of the program more than with each other. While at St. Stephen's there was the same overwhelming admiration for the top leadership, there were clear signs that people were building relationships with each other as well.

Still, whether or not they knew each other well, there was an amazing sense of belonging. The volunteers feel like they belong to this food pantry ministry, but also to either Clay Street Table or St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, and many of the people who come only to receive food

feel that sense of belonging as well. Like at Trinity Memorial, some people did not know exactly which program they belonged to, Clay Street Table or St. Stephen's or the food pantry, although a surprising number of people described feeling like part of St. Stephen's, and mentioned other involvement they have at St. Stephen's. Because of the surrounding housing, many people were invited to volunteer by their neighbors. It is not clear whether or not people developed new friendships at the programs they worked at or as noted above, whether there are friendships that cross the boundary between food secure and food insecure. My interview questions presumed that people would become friends as part of the ministry, but because of the housing adjacent to St. Stephen's many people were brought into the ministry by their existing friends. At St. Stephen's the volunteers were almost all literally neighbors of each other. I could see clearly that volunteers and shoppers were friendly to each other. They also told me they felt they could get support from one another if they needed it. There is a way that the Clay Street Table food pantry had the elements of church.

At St. Stephen's, to a larger degree than at Trinity Memorial, it appeared that being able to volunteer gave people a sense of authority and ownership of the program, but also a sense of being part of the church. Volunteers described feeling that their skills and experience were recognized and appreciated. It was interesting to see that Coffee Bill simply took his authority at St. Stephen's Chili Lunch, and similarly a church member who is food secure took the authority to sit and visit with a participant. While the general sense that the rules were only loosely enforced was a frustration for many, it was also permission for individuals to take charge of a particular situation. Like at Trinity Memorial, there did not appear to be direct training. St. Stephen's use of a hands-on director led to people being moved off important jobs they were not very good at, and more skilled people put in their place. Still there were a few people who took

authority that resulted in conflicts, and more than a few people who volunteered but did not actually *do* anything. There were people who needed more direction in order to volunteer, and there were not enough people with the skills, or perhaps the authority, to give that direction.

Even more than at Trinity Memorial's Chat and Chew, the food pantry at St. Stephen's was chaotic. One difference between the Chili Lunch and the Food Pantry was that in the Chili Lunch the rules were clear. It was easy to know if you should go in the kitchen (no) and if you could have seconds (yes, once it is announced). It appeared that I was the only serious rule breaker at Chili Lunch, with my backpack at my seat. At the Food Pantry rules were loosely followed, the signs were ineffective at informing people about how much they could take, and the volunteers at each station were sometimes pushy and sometimes inattentive. The skills required including knowing when to restock, when to enforce the rules or be generous, and how to deescalate a situation. It would have helped to have more people comfortable with asking someone to cover for a break, and more patience with communication. It was simply not true that all the volunteers had all the skills they needed in a particular circumstance. On the other hand, the chaos and inefficiencies created more work, creating work made more places for people to volunteer, and the leadership constantly pulled people into those volunteer opportunities.

The people who needed the food wanted more rules and got upset when someone broke the rules, while the people with enough food were frustrated at the end because there was so much food left over, most of which had to be thrown away. It was interesting to note how little Paul knew about the details of the program. His hands-off style gave people authority, but also made it hard to find fixes to the inefficiencies and chaos. At Trinity Memorial, Donna knew what was going on, but because her focus was on relationship building, she became the bottleneck in getting work done. Here Paul prioritized relationship building over understanding what was

happening, in part because he could delegate the details to Stephanie. From my vantage point it appeared that some of Paul's description of how the program ran were not completely accurate, although I doubt he would be upset to learn that. It appeared that he would support volunteers in their choice of how to carry out the ministry, rather than remind them of the original plan.

The challenge that Paul did notice and was actively trying to change was the discrimination against the Chinese people who volunteered at the pantry and came to the pantry for food. Paul explicitly identified this as the challenge to see Christ in one another as described in Matthew 25. While language differences definitely made the problem worse, the cultural problem did not go away when they added Chinese language signs. The Chinese people often took extra, but were reprimanded for that, whether there was plenty or not. White and African American volunteers complained in the interviews about Chinese people taking extra, but some also mentioned that they got extra. They explained the dichotomy by telling me they asked Stephanie and got permission for their exception. One fight broke out while I was there over a Chinese volunteer who was insisting that people take more soup, that is, she was giving away more than she was supposed to, and that was as offensive to the other volunteers as if she was taking too much. Paul talked about the challenge of dealing with the cultural differences with me, and with every person who got into the arguments, and it was mentioned in most of the interviews. Paul was quite explicit in teaching people to say Asian American or Chinese, not oriental, and in encouraging people to talk directly to each other. During our interview, he mentioned his frustration with the racism present in the program, and made it clear to people that he would not restrict people from getting food, or volunteering, based on their culture or language. For the most part it appeared that most volunteers simply accepted that as the way Paul is, and connected it to the fact that he just is not going to enforce rules. Clay Street Table is

wrestling with difference based on race and language. They have not found the solution, but they refuse to stop engaging with the questions. I had hoped that shared ministry would create the environment on which solidarity and conscientization based on class would occur. I did not predict the way that racism among food insecure individuals would interfere with recognizing their similarities as people oppressed by systems that cause food scarcity. Like at Trinity Memorial, St. Stephen's shared ministry did not lead to clear conscientization nor a sense of solidarity around class issues. It was interesting to have a food insecure person provide a systems analysis of poverty, but neither St. Stephen's nor Trinity Memorial point to shared ministry leading to a real Gutiérrez-style solidarity.

Fresh Market at Church for All People in Columbus, OH

Church for All People is located in a run-down storefront on a run-down street in a run-down neighborhood. Their website describes themselves as “the front porch to the Kingdom of God”³ and lists a wide variety of programs including bible study, music, bike repair, and health ministries.⁴ Before the church was started, downtown Columbus had a United Methodist (UMC) thrift store, run by the district superintendent and shared by UMC churches in the area. Over time the organizers noticed that a community was developing around the thrift store volunteers, and Church for All People was created in 2002. The thrift shop, called the “Free Store” is still central to the ministry. They have involved people in need of material resources as volunteers from the beginning, both at the ministries and at the nearly daily worship services.

³ “Core Values,” *Church and Community Development for All People*, accessed August 25, 2016, <http://www.4allpeople.org/about-us/>.

⁴ “About CD4AP,” *Church and Community Development for All People*, accessed August 25, 2016, <http://www.4allpeople.org/serve/>.

The church fills a block, with Bikes for All People, Fresh Market (as they call their food pantry) and the worship space and offices of Church for All People, each with a separate entrance. Fresh Market is a narrow store with wide shelving on the right, narrow shelving on the left, and stairs up to a loft/office in the back. The walls are painted and worn, the floors hardwood, and round lights hang from the very tall ceiling. A small storage closet holds cleaning supplies and volunteers' personal belongings. It is unlocked but would be hard to access unnoticed. There are large shelves along the left wall for produce, several domestic refrigerators, one commercial cooler, and steel industrial tables on the right. Only Fresh Market volunteers can be in the space unless the market is open, but next door the church is a place to hang out, with a small kitchen, coffee station, and bathrooms. More than one person told me that there is a rule at this church—if the door is unlocked, the coffee is on.

Fresh Market is a relatively new addition to Church for All People's ministries, and is funded by a grant for nutrition training from the nearby hospital. People who want food choose an appointment time Tuesday afternoon or Wednesday morning and attend a half-hour class to learn cooking tips and get on-going nutrition education. After the class each person receives a slip that identifies the size of their household that determines how much they can take of each item at the Market. Miss L.,⁵ a small white woman with a quick smile who lives in subsidized senior housing nearby, manages the details of Fresh Market, along with Ralph, an African American, middle-aged man. They each receive a stipend for their work. I met with The Rev. John Edgar, the founder, pastor, and executive director of Church for All People.

⁵ Interestingly, while the pastor was just called Greg, Miss L. was always referred to with the title Miss followed by her first name or initial. She is a lay person.

Church for All People-Primary Informant Interview

My Key Informant is The Rev. Greg Henneman, Church & Community Worker, and Healthy Eating and Living (H.E.A.L.) Director. He is a young white man I met when he was an outdoor church pastor at an Ecclesia affiliate in Albuquerque, New Mexico; at the time of my interview he had been at Church for All People a year, running their food and nutrition programs. Greg has a closet-sized office just off the worship space and people stream in and out throughout our interview. He holds the details lightly as he is asked about many parts of the ministry, offering advice occasionally, but mostly agreeing with the suggestions of those who need affirmation. He jokes easily, touches people lightly on the hand or arm, and checks more on how people are feeling than on what they are doing. When I asked what he loves best he focused on worship, he loves the racial diversity, the inclusion of lay people, and that the prayers of the people are very real and central to worship. I asked about the two week day worship services I visited that were nearly ninety percent people of color, but Greg reports that Sunday worship has a larger white attendance. He estimates that the congregation is evenly split between African Americans and people who are White, and that there is a significant Asian and Hispanic presence. He notes that mostly, but not universally, the white people have more food security.

For Greg, no matter what is being given away, the purpose of the program is to create community, and he sees shared ministry as simply the right way to interact with people. The problems seem just as clear to him: that people who are food insecure can be very strict with the rules, and can be quick to judge others who also need food. Greg said, “It’s hard to get volunteers who are food insecure to be universally welcoming,” and noted that there is constant complaining about letting some people into the food pantry. The volunteers often seem to focus

on equity rather than fairness. As one example, he has seen Fresh Market volunteers require someone to take an item they do not want, because otherwise it would not be equal.

Church for All People-Participant Observation

Fresh Market Food Pantry is open on Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday morning. I arrived to volunteer very early Tuesday morning, and joined a group of men, mostly young or middle aged, and mostly African American. The food bank truck backed up to us and they quickly moved into action with little direction, some of the men used hand trucks to drop pallets of potatoes, sweet potatoes, and oranges onto the sidewalk, and others, myself included, moved boxes off the pallets and onto smaller hand trucks that fit the doorway of Fresh Market. It was not clear if people knew each other. It looked like people were arriving and leaving somewhat randomly and the work was too strenuous for chat. At one point Miss L. came out to tell us to bring in a few loads of the lighter things so the women inside could start sorting. Everyone agreed to what she said, but no one brought any of the lighter things inside.

Inside Fresh Market a group of four women were chatting as the men moved heavy loads past them to the back of the space. Eventually the men brought in the lighter cases filled with yogurt and gallons of orange juice and the women showed me how to open the cases, move the individual items into the commercial cooler, and break down the boxes for recycling. We moved quickly and while we worked, Miss L. came by to say that the yogurt needs to be in the smaller refrigerators instead. We started moving the yogurt boxes just as the next batch of yogurt arrived, and it turned out to be quarts rather than single serving containers. As we worked, the women discussed how best to decide who gets the single servings and who gets the quarts, although in the end Miss. L. made the decision. The men continued to stack the pallets of onions, potatoes, and sweet potatoes in a pile that quickly expanded to block access to the refrigerators. Eventually

the women managed to get them to move some of them out of the way. At one point Greg came in and pointed out to a volunteer that a couple of light bulbs were out, and asked him to change the bulbs after we finished the set-up. Instead the man set up a ladder in the middle of the room, stopping all unloading as he changed the bulb. Some of the men who unloaded disappeared once all the food was inside but a handful joined the women inside. That group worked together all day. The volunteer team is African American except for one Filipino woman, one white woman, and me, and the team is mostly young or middle aged. At the time I presumed that they were mostly people who are food insecure.

Once the cold items were stored we began sorting out the rotten potatoes, sweet potatoes, and oranges and putting the usable ones into bags for distribution. There was a quick discussion about a man who no one knew who had managed to help us load a few boxes to look like a volunteer, but then put two boxes into his car and drove off. As we worked the conversation turned to checking-in with each other, gossip, and complaining about the weather. We were spread out, but the room was small. I asked the group about how the program works, what they like to do, and how they got involved. They did not all know each other's names, and there was some joking around misnaming folk, and some embarrassment as it became clear that despite being a regular volunteer no one knew the Filipino woman's name. As at St. Stephen's, they also identified her as Asian, Oriental, or Chinese. Yet they did seem to know her, and each other, and about more than their lives as volunteers. When one person was short with me, the others came to me later to explain a difficulty she was facing with her family. They appreciated each other's skills, and divided the work of who should hand out which food item almost by consensus.

When it was finally time for the first group of shoppers to arrive, and we stood ready, it turned out that while we had organized ourselves, no one organized those coming for food. The

people receiving food could not tell where they were supposed to go, and none of the volunteers directed them. After several “come in, come in” instructions, a volunteer finally said, “start over here with onions,” and the first person moved past the open boxes of sweet potatoes to get to the woman handing out onions. That shopper then began discussing the onions, and how many bags she could take, which made Grace, who was waiting to distribute orange juice and yogurt, impatient. Grace started telling people to keep moving, despite the fact that there was not enough room to pass by the onion discussion. A line formed, so Grace squeezed past the onions and, starting with the second shopper, dropped yogurt and orange juice into each person’s bag. She left the single serving yogurts in the box of 12, so the box blocked space for any other items. The first woman finally had her onions and moved toward the refrigerators, but Grace was not there to hand her yogurt or orange juice because she was taking sweet potatoes from the shelf by me and putting them into shoppers’ bags. Grace finally returned to her station and the line began moving more smoothly. People came to my spot for sweet potatoes, but some of them had already received one bag from Grace, and then asked me for a second bag. I had been told to give two bags of sweet potatoes to people with larger families so I asked to see the slip that identifies this, however, most people had not kept that slip out to show. It turned out only new volunteers ever ask to see the slips. A few of the shoppers were new and they tried to hand over their slip as they left the pantry, but the man at the door wanted to help pack their bag more carefully and would not take the slip. Finally we served all twenty from the first group.

Once they left, the pantry team had a break while the next nutrition class took place in the worship hall. There were several groups of fifteen to twenty early in the afternoon, but the later groups were smaller, as few as three and more often around ten people at a time. The line went smoothly for the later groups, although each group did not know how to get started, and the

volunteers were slow to instruct them. The volunteers stepped out between groups to have a cigarette or to use the bathroom, and continued chatting with one another. There was lots of teasing and casual light touching, shaking hands, tapping shoulders and arms, and half hugs. We celebrated with cheers for the birthday of a family member and later for a new baby. A great deal of the discussion was about race and ethnic identity and how that impacts the neighborhoods around the church. There were also jokes about who is more black, and instances of people intentionally misidentifying the race of family members, followed by laughter and friendly jabs.

Most of the same core group of volunteers returned early the next morning for another three hours of handing out food. The volunteers were tired, but the banter continued. When volunteers from the clothing ministries came in to shop for food, there was much excitement about the orange juice, and I noticed Grace gave some people two gallons instead of the one allotted. In the end, we did not have juice for the last twenty people. Miss L. dropped the yogurt allotment to six individual servings, but people who asked were given more until we also ran out of that before the last shoppers came through. Sweet potatoes were plentiful and I was encouraged to get people to take as many as possible. There was a lot of discussion of sweet potato pie, and as the Fresh Market closed two cases of sweet potatoes were loaded into the back of a shopper's car so she could make pie for all of us. All of the food was distributed and while some volunteers took extra, no one took huge amounts.

Church for All People-Volunteer Interviews and Questionnaires

At this site my effort to be participant observer conflicted with my ability to get interviews with volunteers. In the end, I got five interviews, and one questionnaire, all from people who I believed did not have food security. Only two of those interviews were with volunteers for the Fresh Market food pantry. Greg pushed people to interview, so the five were

people who volunteered for other Church for All People programs and felt it important to do as he asked. One person identified frustration as a volunteer. She was not sure that her gifts were appreciated, she felt others did not know she had had a professional work history before her retirement, and in general she felt that the way to get along was to tolerate the way she is treated. Still she appreciated the general good feeling that comes with joking and laughing together and feels the leadership, both Greg and Miss L., would stand up for her if she needed it. She found the program by enrolling in the church's cooking class.

The volunteers I talked to as I participated, and the ones that did interviews, all expressed that they felt part of Church for All People and part of Fresh Market. It felt to me like Fresh Market belongs to the volunteers that run it, they feel authorized to make rules and to take charge of the ministry. They want to please Miss L., who tends to enforce rules, and they love her for that. At the same time, they want to please Greg, who is more likely to ignore the rules, and they love him for that. In addition to helping at Fresh Market, they sing in the choir, help with Sunday breakfast, and engage in worship, some on Sunday, but many at the weekday services. They talked about "back at the old location" and about fights, arguments, and decisions that the church has made. Some of them remember the Free Store from before the church started. The people who volunteer belong to this church.

All of the volunteers who did interviews, regardless of whether they were part of Fresh Market, were quick to describe their gifts for their particular volunteer role, and many described other gifts they contribute elsewhere, particularly to worship. All described a sense of belonging to the church, whether or not they attended Sunday services. Most of the volunteers responded to the question about challenges with the other volunteers by explaining that they had learned to walk away when others were mean. They mentioned swearing, use of the "n-word", and people

who stink as the major challenges of the ministry. I was interested that the solution to the people who stink was not to welcome them in, but rather to assign someone the task of bringing the food out to them. Everyone mentioned the joking, and the light-hearted feel, and this matched my own feeling as I participated. For the most part volunteers were reticent to critique other volunteers, although they admitted generically that there are challenges in volunteering together. This was always followed with the reassurance that it all worked out well in the end. Some responded by assuring me that the others were trying hard, or that they have good manners. Everyone mentioned how important, and kind, both Greg and Miss L.⁶ are, and identified them when asked about connections to each other. Everyone is connected to one another through these two beloved leaders. “They always have time for me” was a common refrain. There was one African American volunteer who I was sure was food insecure. I later met his wife at a dinner. She is a white-collar professional and they volunteer at Church for All People out of gratefulness for the resources they have. Another volunteer, white and middle-aged, I assumed was food secure, until she shared that she volunteers to give back because there was a long time that the food pantry was her only source of food and it still stretches her budget.

Church for All People-Other Interviews

During my visit I sat in on a training Church for All People was offering to a group of outside observers and The Rev. John Edgar, the founder, mentioned his frustration with language around direct service ministry being toxic. I interviewed him later to get more detail on his reaction. As we talked I realized that John had used the language “toxic charity” but his concern was primarily with some of the ideas in Corbett and Fikkert’s book *When Helping Hurts* rather than Robert Lupton’s *Toxic Charity*. Specifically he was concerned with churches that were

⁶ Greg and Miss L. were the only names all pantry volunteers knew.

ending their charity programs because of Corbett and Fikkert's suggestion that direct service is only appropriate in short-term situations. John's first response to my questioning was to emphasize the systemic marginalization of people who live in poverty and of people of color. Corbett and Fikkert suggest that direct service ministry should be the response to events like tsunamis. John argued that food and housing ministries in the U.S. are symptoms of a "chronic tsunami" of oppression in the U.S. He asserted that calling give-away programs "toxic charity" and encouraging churches to stop those programs causes horrible suffering. In addition, he noted that even if we had the business community involved, it is unrealistic to imagine that jobs will be offered at a living wage, near the communities in need, any time soon.

In the training, John had described how Church for All People found out that pregnant congregants were being denied health insurance. Essentially, the state was taking nine months to approve coverage, thus ensuring that individuals did not get pre-natal care. At first the state responded to the church's complaints by approving an individual's application if the church spoke up. Because of their connection to people who live in poverty, and their connection to local organizations such as the hospital, the church was able to join a coalition that got the practice of delaying approval outlawed. When I suggested that they were doing what Corbett and Fikkert were arguing for, improving conditions by changing the local environment, John disagreed. The church's role, he insisted, is creating community, *not* community organizing. He feels that one of the side affects of being in community is to be pulled into community development or organizing when the other organizers call for it, but that churches will never be involved in those activities if they do not know the neighborhood and create community in the neighborhood. This matches Gutiérrez and Russell's emphasis on church being the community rather than doing mission in the community. John is in favor of people who need resources being

volunteers, but his starting point is that the church will create any program, and give away any resource, that will draw people in and provide an opportunity for them to know one another. Further John insisted that any concern about dependence is not a biblical concern. The gospel says to give people the resources they need. He noted that he is seeing churches end their direct service ministries using the concept of toxic charity as their reasoning, not filling that gap with community development, and thus leaving people who need material resources to suffer.

Church for All People-Learnings

Although the Fresh Market Food Pantry is new, Church for All People is experienced at providing resources to people who need it using shared ministry. They began their Free Store with people who needed clothes as volunteers, and run the food pantry almost completely with people who are food insecure. Like the other sites, the sense of belonging was palatable, and volunteers expressed a sense of authority and of being appreciated as important contributors. St. Stephen's builds on this sense of shared giving and community of belonging by addressing the challenges of racism within the community. Church for All People has carried this one step further by engaging in shared action to take on the systems that work against people who live in poverty. Whether this is solidarity or has resulted in conscientization of the people with and without food cannot be determined by my short observations, and even a longer study likely would not show a definitive connection between shared ministry and the ability to take action.

I started with the presumption that shared ministry is shared between people who have enough and who do not have enough food. The Church for All People site made it clear that this line is not clear. Many volunteers at the Fresh Market mentioned that they "used to" need the food pantry, and even those who were not dependent on the food appreciated a chance to stretch their budget. In addition I was imagining pairs of volunteers, half food secure and half insecure,

when at all the sites that had food insecure volunteers they were the large majority, food secure volunteers may have been ten to twenty percent of the total. Because it was hard to keep track of who was who, I could not see if people knew people whose food security was different from their own. At Church for All People it would have helped to visit more of the variety of their programming, and if I had attended Sunday worship I might have seen more boundary crossing.

Fresh Market is helping people feel like they belong to Church for All People and to Fresh Market. Both this ministry and the one at St. Stephen's effectively communicated that volunteers are a part of the congregation. I did not see anything in particular that either church did to encourage that, but people reported that they belonged at both sites. The people who volunteered were not necessarily friends, and they were certainly annoyed with each other at times, but they were, together, living out community similar to the early Christian community described in Acts. Each person had a responsibility, and each person attended to the others. Greg was explicit in his effort to see each person as Christ, and although it is not clear if this was communicated with the participants, they certainly saw each other as people to be appreciated.

The volunteers felt responsible for their particular tasks, and their authority was respected. As at the other sites there was little visible instruction or training, and at this site Miss L. was often not present during the distribution, so ineffective volunteers were not redirected. No one challenged Grace's decision to disrupt the line by handing things out, other volunteers were not challenged when they failed to do tasks they had been assigned. With little supervision, the group of Fresh Market volunteers formed more a self-reliant team than at any of the other sites, they figured out what to do without involving either Greg or Miss L. While the volunteers used language that showed they recognized them as the final authority, and that they loved working with them, most of the time I was participating the official leadership was not present. Perhaps as

a result of that, this site showed more signs that people were building connections to each other, rather than to the leaders, than at the other sites. However, these connections could be a result of the smaller number of volunteers. There was a team of eight at Fresh Market, as opposed to forty at St. Stephen's. Greg is new and it is unclear if that influences the results I saw.

As was true with the leadership at Trinity Memorial and St. Stephen's, Greg's strength was community building, not details. He was not sure about exactly how the program was carried out, but he knew all the people involved. Miss L. offered less direction than Stephanie at St. Stephen's, but similarly she was the rules keeper and Greg was the rules breaker. Like at St. Stephen's the volunteers recognized the difference and appreciated them both. The result was again ministry that was chaotic, inefficient, and yet effective. While many tasks were done and then redone differently, Church for All People's Fresh Market did not waste any of the food, most items were distributed relatively equally among the shoppers, and in the end everyone who came received the food they wanted and all of the food was given away. The goal was to make a space for everyone who wanted to volunteer. This may be why the man who helped unload could get away with joining the group before stealing the two cases of food. The community had very little reaction beyond annoyance to his stealing. The goal of the ministry is community building and involvement. Efficiency was not a goal at any of the programs I visited.

The volunteers' dialogue about racism at Fresh Market was people of color discussing the oppression they face, rather than white people struggling with how they treat Asian Americans, as at St. Stephen's, or the silence on race at Trinity Memorial. Church for All People is the only site where the church was engaged in community organizing but this was not discussed by any of the volunteers with whom I interacted, and even John Edgar emphasized it was simply a benefit of being in community together, rather than a goal of the ministry. It felt to me, from John's

description, that it was an experience of solidarity, and that it required, and resulted in, conscientization of those involved. For John, the goal of the food ministry at Church for All People is *not* that conscientization or social action, but the goal is the creation of the front porch of the Kingdom of God, the creation of a place where everyone can belong.

Project-44 at Acton United Methodist Church in Granbury, TX.

I am reporting last on my visit to Project-44, a shared garden ministry in Granbury, Texas. While my visit was interesting and allowed me to include a garden, I did not get to see shared ministry at this site. It is the vision of the leadership that they will have shared ministry as they grow the ministry. The Rev. Margaret Fields is Pastor of Outreach at Acton United Methodist Church. She started Project-44 in 2010 as what she calls GSA: God Supported Agriculture⁷. The goal is to grow organic produce and share it with local families in need. The two-and-a-half acre farm was donated and includes a run-down farmhouse, a chicken coop, a large low building for hydroponic farming, a tree house retreat for clergy, and a small fenced off oil well. Harvest is in the fall, except for two varieties of lettuce grown in the hydroponic tanks, and eggs, both of which are available year round. I visited in the spring, when there is mostly planting, the summer is mostly weeding. Volunteers come from surrounding churches and from households that need more access to food, and work together to plant, maintain, and harvest vegetables. Each volunteer takes home a portion of what they harvest and leaves a portion for the local food bank. A local farmer manages the crops and supervises volunteers.

⁷ "Farm Ministry," *Project 44*, accessed September 23, 2016, <https://project-44.org/44-farm/>.

Project-44-Key Informant Interview

My primary informant is Jennifer Sterling, a white young adult affiliated with the Acton United Methodist Church, the Project-44 Community Builder. She has a Master of Social Work and is focused on how to use the farm to create community. She hoped that people with food insecurity might come in the spring because lettuce is harvested year round, but because of the torrential rains the impression is that there was no harvest. She reports volunteer numbers are significantly higher in the fall when people expect a harvest, but youth programs and service projects are on the schedule all year, including during my weekend visit. Jennifer reports that the sense of community onsite at the garden ebbs and flows. She feels she has created relationships with some of the people who are food insecure, and that they volunteer when they have access to transportation. Sometimes she meets people at the church who were picking up food, and then drives them to the farm to add eggs to their food supply. She described the challenge to convert relationships with her into relationships with the community that works the farm.

Project-44-Participant Observation and Interviews

I worked with volunteer teams on Saturday and Sunday, but despite Jennifer's efforts to get people who were food insecure to take part, she reported that the volunteers were all food secure. Saturday I worked with a few adults from several different churches and gardening groups in the area and Sunday a high school youth group volunteered. The volunteers were not able to stay afterward for interviews, and I could not use my computer in the mud, so I kept the interview questions in my mind as I worked, skipped the questionnaire, and was able to do informal interviews as we harvested and mulched. I recorded my interview results and observations at a nearby coffee shop immediately after each day's visits.

The Saturday volunteers were five white women, one white man and his young son, and three middle-school aged white children. Jennifer led us on a tour of the farm that includes information on crops, how they are used, and how they are distributed to people who need food. The kids were invited to look for eggs and found several to put into cartons. The food is distributed to local food pantries, the food bank, and to ten families. The program is looking for volunteer families to do consistent weekly food delivery, and to build a relationship with the receiving families. During the tour, as Jennifer pointed out each item she often named a volunteer who made it happen: the boy scout who built the chicken coop, the man who proposed moving this plant to a better spot, the woman who knew more resilient variety of that crop.

Our assignment was to mulch four fifty-foot long rows of peppers. The wet winter had created muddy paths and the mulch was across the road. One person shoveled mulch into buckets and wheelbarrows, and the rest of us carried these and placed the mulch around the peppers with our hands. At first it looked inefficient, but it became quickly apparent that we were working at very different speeds, so there was always someone filling buckets, but rarely much waiting. As we worked the young boy would cheer for the “winning” mulching team. Sarah and Joanne were volunteering because the *Discipleship* course at their church requires community service hours, one wanted to support people who are hungry, the other just wanted a program that fit her schedule. Sarah liked that the work is hard, which helps her feel like her contribution is significant. Another woman was explicit that she comes to get her hands dirty, but does not actually want to meet other people. The woman came with three kids comes as part of her church’s “church without walls” program. Jennifer encouraged us to break for water and visiting and then moved us to mulching the tomatillos. While Jennifer was working to help us to talk with one another, few of the volunteers were there to meet other volunteers.

Sunday afternoon I joined Project-44 again, along with a youth group, which included a youth minister, her mother, another adult, and two teens, Karen and Olivia. Our job was to harvest the last of the strawberries. We gathered around thirty quarts of strawberries and we each got a plastic pint bag and to fill and take home. One youth worked hard, while the other mostly watched. They were supportive of one another, and when Karen sometimes did not understand directions Olivia was quickly by her side to help her. Olivia stated that she is glad this is a site for the youth group because she likes farming, but she did not express any particular interest in where the food goes. They talked about this being “their” ministry and they were eager to tell me things about the farm from their previous visits. They felt like they belonged in the space.

Project-44-Learnings

The volunteers at Project-44 had varying levels of interest in food ministry and some were mostly interested in gardening. Even for the volunteers who were interested in making sure the food reached people who are food insecure, the primary motivation was that the ministry met their needs for volunteering. The volunteers on Saturday were mostly in the role of visitor or guest, but the Sunday youth group had a sense of belonging to the space. They all knew each other, and knew the site. Since the youth group members knew each other before they arrived, this sense of belonging grew in part out of their comfort with one another. It is possible that Project-44 was the “newcomer” to their experience. On the whole, this visit did not make a significant contribution to my research. It would be interesting to see whether Project-44 has significant shared ministry at harvest time.

Critique of Research Method

This research project face a number of challenges and yet resulted in rich stories and a beginning picture of shared ministry. During site selection one difficulty grew out of the chain

sampling strategy for identifying congregations to visit. My connections led me to identify mostly white churches, and led to selecting four sites with white, progressive church leadership. All but Church for All People were majority white congregations with a majority of white volunteers. Three sites are closely connected to Ecclesia Ministries, a network of street ministries. I provide support services for these ministries. However this bias also led me to four sites where the leaders started with the assumption that people in poverty have the ability to make their own decisions and the knowledge and skills to volunteer. The key informants were eager to have people who are food insecure as volunteers in their ministries.

At each site visit it was obvious that churches engaging in food ministries are developing creative options that allow them to treat food insecure people with respect. Shared ministry was not the only approach. My initial phone calls left me with a broad picture of a wide diversity of food ministries in the United States, most of which expressed a desire to treat the people who are food insecure with respect. The four sites selected were excited to have me come, wanted to show off what they were doing, and were helpful in arranging travel and housing. The key informants were enthusiastic, gave me a great deal of their time, and encouraged the participants in their programs to share with me. All but two of the volunteers I interviewed in all of the programs felt good about their chance to describe what they were doing in the ministry. In all of the programs the volunteers quickly incorporated me as a participant in their work, and shared somewhat freely how they felt about the program. Overall I saw shared ministry at work, and it worked as a strategy for distributing food, it produced work volunteers were proud of, and it created a sense of belonging. In addition many of the sites have asked to see the final project report.

During site selection interviews many ministry leaders said they did shared ministry, but after more conversation that I realized that they did not include people who are food insecure as volunteers. Instead, they were proud of the way they served people with grace and welcome. Several were especially interested in letting me know the effort they had made to treat people as guests rather than clients. My impression, without data to back it up, is that they were excited to be included as an example in a study and had not considered the possibility that there was more they could be doing to include the eaters more fully. Once they understood, some were interested in learning more about shared ministry and this project.

Trinity Memorial and St. Stephen's each had programs that were essentially run by food secure people and separate programs run by people who are food insecure. This could have led to interesting reflection on the similarities and differences between these programs, but my study was not designed for such comparisons. I was quickly integrated as participant observer at each site, but people were not willing to stay after the program so I could not do both interviews and participant observations fully at any site. At one program I got less than my planned than five interviews, at one I had only two interviews from the program I was visiting, and at all sites I missed some participant observation time to do interviews. At Project-44 I set aside formal interviews completely. With more time and resources, this research would have benefited from two visits to each program, once for observation, and again for interviews. Attending Sunday worship at Church for All People and St. Stephen's, where volunteers with and without food security consistently described themselves as members of the congregation, would be a valuable contribution to an extended study.

During the interviews the volunteers really wanted to tell me about themselves personally, about how the food ministry worked, and not about how they related to one another.

In retrospect, the research model did not allow enough time to build the trust necessary to engage emotions and critique in the interview. I was able to build quick rapport with people engaged in these programs, but that is not the same as trust. People wanted me to see the value in, and their love for, the programs I was observing. With only one exception the interviews are stories of why the volunteers love the program or love the program director. While two visits would have been better, it is possible that questions of belonging and appreciation for one another can only be recognized after months of observation and conversation. The question about how ministries changed to this system of shared leadership and shared work presumed that ministries started one way and changed to the other. All the sites were doing ministry as originally designed.

As a smaller issue, the word “gifts” was shown to be insider religious language for skills or abilities, and so required translating. Most volunteers needed a great deal of help responding to the questionnaire, and the results did not provide new information although they did back-up my observations. It did provide interesting commentary when at two different sites volunteers who were homeless not only identified themselves as having plenty of access to food, but also wrote in or commented to me that people who could not find food were just lazy. The question demonstrated nicely that people like me who have plenty of food do not know much about how food insecure people describe themselves. It did not provide reliable information about who has and does not have food. People were uncomfortable with rating other people, and unsure of the difference between “I am good at this” and “others recognize I am good at this.” In the end most participants identified that the right-most choice on the scale was the “best” answer and chose it throughout the questionnaire.

I suspect that the Hawthorne Effect, where participant say what they believe I wanted to hear,⁸ influenced the almost universally positive feedback I found in this study. The leader of the each program made the introductions for interviews, people wanted to please the leader, and so those interviewed reported on how good the leader was. At the same time volunteers were proud of their work and wanted me to understand that it was worthwhile and meaningful. I asked specifically about problems with the ministry, but got most useful critique from the key informant rather than the volunteers.

Overall this is a descriptive study and while the challenges described affected some of the data collected they did not prevent me from gathering rich descriptions of the ministries I visited. The trustworthiness⁹ of this study is dependent mostly on the credibility of the interviewer and those being interviewed. While the Hawthorne Effect limits my ability to know if a ministry is as wonderful for the volunteers as they describe, there are enough positive words from the negative interviewees to match the overall positive impression I had as participant observer. This also matched the key informant's impressions. It is reasonable to assume that most of what I saw is what was really happening.

A difficult question for much qualitative research is the question of generalizability,¹⁰ and whether this study gives us a sense of what is happening in shared ministry at other locations. While there are ways to increase the generalizability of research, there is little in this study that can be used to predict the results at another site, or even whether they would be replicated at the same site another time. However, the study results do suggest that people with food insecurity

⁸ Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 82.

⁹ Ibid., 214.

¹⁰ Ibid., 215.

can be volunteers at some food ministries, there will be some volunteers who demonstrate surprising skills and others who do not, and people who volunteer feel good about that experience. The strong sense of belonging that I felt at these four sites is not necessarily connected in any way to shared ministry, for example it could be the result of good leadership, or excellent communication, or some other factor entirely.

Internally, the parts of this study show good coherence¹¹, for the most part the descriptions of the key informant, the volunteers interviewed, and my observations matched one another. Except as described above, the interviews and observations result in a picture of shared ministry. The questionnaires contribute little to that description. While my internal coherence is supported by triangulation¹² some of that similarity can be explained instead by the Hawthorne Effect, the volunteers quoted the key informant in their own words during the interview. In this study there is not a way to know how much of that is because the key informant's guidance is well-accepted by the volunteers, or if the volunteers are trying to make the key informant look good. Individual actions I witnessed supported the general learning that creating a loving community is the priority, that people feel like they belong, and that given the opportunity, people appreciate the chance to volunteer and take a leadership role.

In addition to a description of shared ministry I intended to describe relationships that had developed and to compare responses in the surveys, but the technical challenges of the study limit my ability to do that. In addition, the description of the various sites will not be easily comparable with one another because of the time I missed at some sites in order to interview

¹¹ Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 218.

¹² *Ibid.*, 73.

volunteers. Yet, on the whole, I can develop a beginning picture of some of the benefits and challenges of shared food ministries.

Implications for Shared Ministry

All four sites had a goal of shared ministry and are at different places in developing that sharing. Project-44 is beginning to make the effort, Trinity Memorial is giving people with food insecurity the chance to cook for each other, St. Stephen's is beginning to cross the boundaries of different levels of food security, and at Church for All People they are using the community built through shared ministry to make changes to the systems that maintain poverty. I observed the ministries as chaotic, inefficient, and welcoming spaces where all of the volunteers described themselves as belonging. The volunteers further expressed that their programs were communities where they felt appreciated for their abilities, and where many exercised a sense of leadership and authority. In two sites the volunteers were engaged in questions of oppression between the different people who volunteer, but did not share with me feelings or knowledge about the oppression faced by people living in poverty. This study cannot draw definitive conclusions as to whether volunteers crossed the boundaries of food secure and food insecurity, but it does appear to be happening at St. Stephen's and Church for All People. While there were people who recognized and described the systemic nature of poverty, this project does not reveal a connection between participation in shared ministry and conscientization of people with or without food security. It is also not clear that the observed solidarity among volunteers and staff at Church for All People is a result of the shared ministry. Chapter Seven offers conclusions and proposes ideas for future research

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

At the end of Section One, I proposed five criteria for shared ministry that were intended to improve on the concerns with direct service ministry noted in Chapter Two, incorporate my reading of Matthew 25:31-46 and Acts 6:1-6, and build on the theologies of Gustavo Gutiérrez and Letty Russell. The five criteria are that shared ministry

- starts with the people who need material resources,
- gathers people to eat together,
- makes space for people to work together,
- attends to power dynamics, and
- rejoices together.

My final conclusions are based on the three sites where I saw shared ministry: Trinity Memorial Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Portland, Oregon, and Church for All People (UMC) in Columbus, Ohio. When visiting these sites, I observed that they were starting with the people who need material resources, and making space for people to work together, and were also creating church-like community in the gathering.

Although I observed people eating together, my observations do not point clearly to what role the sharing and listening that happens while eating play in making the ministry shared. Attending to class-based power dynamics was not present in a significant way. While there was rejoicing in successes and small experiences of co-creating with God as Russell defines rejoicing, this was a small piece of the larger observation that each shared ministry site created a church-like community of belonging. In this chapter, I explore the components I witnessed, evaluate the

meaning of the missing components, and propose additional research to expand the church's ability to engage in shared ministry. This first study of shared ministry suggests that it is a valuable tool for overcoming the problems with direct service ministry and is an important area for more study. In what follows, I will explore the details of starting with food insecure people, creating opportunities to work together, and creating church-like community.

Shared Food Ministry Starts with People Who are Food Insecure

At all three sites where I witnessed shared ministry, the programs started because food insecure individuals noted a particular need. Initially, when I saw that the ministries were connected to people I knew from the Ecclesia network, I assumed this was a weakness of my chain sampling strategy. I was distracted by my presumption that shared ministry would be created by converting a traditional direct service ministry. But interviews with the key informants point out that each started when individuals who were food insecure asked for what they needed. Because the key informants had existing relationships with people who were food insecure and because they listened to what individuals who were food insecure told them, each ministry began at the request of the people who understood the need because it was their own.

As noted in Chapter Two, Saul Alinsky in *Reveille for Radicals* says that community change occurs when organizers begin by asking those who need material resources what programs are needed.¹ He argues this only happens when the organizers know the people who need material resources well enough to be trusted by them.² Gutiérrez similarly argues that

¹ Alinsky, *Reveille for Radicals*, 55.

² Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*, 122.

church must begin engagement with its neighbors by asking what they need.³ One of the problems with direct service ministry noted in Chapter Two is that it often starts with people who have sufficient material resources asking how they can share their excess with others. In this project, shared ministry began with people who needed material resources asking for them, and the church, which had developed relationships with them, choosing to respond to that request.

Trinity Memorial's Chat and Chew began because women who lived in a homeless shelter wanted a way to cook together. They knew and trusted Donna, whom they met through Sanctuary Angels, through the Welcome Church, and at the shelter. The existing relationship made it possible to share their interest in cooking with Donna. She responded by working with them to develop the shared monthly dinner. St. Stephen's Clay Street table was already the site of several meals programs when a participant asked for a way to get food to cook at home. Paul had built relationships with many of the eaters, so this man felt safe asking for what he needed. The Clay Street Table food pantry started with volunteers Paul knew from his connection to the existing meals. Fresh Market food pantry at Church For All People was suggested by members of the church's cooking class who were looking for less expensive ways to access fresh foods. The Church was already using existing food secure and food insecure volunteers for their other programs and continued that practice at Fresh Market. All three shared ministry programs were started based on ideas offered by people who were food insecure.

It is important to note that people who are food insecure do not necessarily want shared ministry. First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Granbury, Texas did not meet my selection criteria. However this ministry allowed people who are food insecure change their program. They started as traditional direct service. People who are food secure church members

³ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 118.

collected food, cooked it, and distributed it from their cars in a neighborhood where people are food insecure. As they got to know the people they gave the food to, they asked those receiving the food what was the best way to distribute the food. Now the church's ministry is to collect and deliver frozen food to the local community center and the people who are food insecure distribute the food themselves. Thus, while I can conclude that shared ministry can rise out of asking people what they want, what people who need material resources want is not always shared ministry. While First Christian Church in Granbury did not have food secure and food insecure volunteers working together, it is a good example of giving people who are food insecure voice and agency in how their material needs can be met. For Russell, people on the margins are fully welcomed when they have the ability to change the practices and structures of programs.⁴ The willingness to recognize that people who are food insecure know what they want, and need, in terms of how to receive the food, is part of recognizing that people who are hungry are Christ, and thus have the ability to discern the best path to meeting their own needs. People who want to serve the hungry Christ must start with what people who are hungry tell them.

Shared Food Ministry is Working Together

Shared ministry presumes that all people are welcomed to work together as volunteers in food programs, specifically those who are food insecure and those who are food secure. What I saw at the shared ministry sites is that each program was able to deliver food to people who needed it using a mix of volunteers. There were many more volunteers in the shared ministry sites than in the direct service programs in the same location, and the key informants reported that a large majority of the volunteers were food insecure. The participants described this as an

⁴ Russell, *Church in the Round*, 25.

overwhelmingly positive experience, using language of being recognized, feeling appreciated, and having the authority to be included in a part of the decision-making. For the most part, the people had the skills that were needed to make a direct service food pantry or meal program take place. There were problems created by the shared work. Some volunteers lacked the skills needed, the ministries were chaotic and inefficient, and some resources were wasted.. In addition I observed little training of participants, and most of the volunteers worked independently. However some “problems” actually made it so there were more volunteer positions available, or contributed to an individual’s ability to step up and lead a small part of the program. Overall, my research project revealed that food was successfully delivered to people who wanted it. Working together created a sense of belonging that was greater than that of simply being a welcoming direct service ministry. While welcoming guests is important, people are not incorporated into the in-group until they are invited to share the work.

Working Together Creates Sense of Authority and Belonging

At the shared ministry sites I visited, people who chose to volunteer felt a sense of authority for their part of the program and felt a strong sense of belonging to the ministry. When invited to volunteer, people with food insecurity choose to volunteer in large numbers. They want to do the work. There were five times more volunteers who were food insecure at Chat and Chew than food secure volunteers at Sanctuary Angels at Trinity Memorial, and ten times more volunteers at the food pantry than at the Chili Lunch at St. Stephen’s. The space inside Fresh Market at Church for All People was very small, but there were still more than ample numbers of volunteers, and twice as many when the team was outside unloading the truck. Greg identified the large majority of volunteers as food insecure. More than one person at St. Stephen’s noted with appreciation that, although they were recipients of many area ministries, they had never

been invited to volunteer before Paul welcomed them to do so. While all three key informants were concerned that I would not find sufficient numbers of food secure volunteers to interview, and I was often unsure as to the food status of individuals, at each site it appears there were about as many food secure volunteers as would be minimally needed to run the program by themselves. Thus, this project demonstrates Russell's concept that making space for volunteers grows new leadership. She argues that reducing the restrictions on who are leaders expands the number of people available to partner in ministries.⁵ People's reasons for volunteering varied. One quoted the Matthew 25 story, most simply felt it was important to help others. This lends support to Schüssler Fiorenza's argument that the widows dissatisfaction in Acts 6:1-7 was that they were not getting a turn to serve others.⁶

Those who chose to volunteer felt significant ownership of the part of the ministry they were engaged in, and many felt they had decision-making authority in their assigned area. As expected, there are leaders among people who are food insecure. It appeared that the women felt ownership of Sanctuary Angels at Trinity memorial even though they did not cook, but they expressed that ownership in the story of helping others during the fire. They owned the Chat and Chew program both because it was their idea and because they did the work. At St. Stephen's Clay Street Table food pantry many people owned their particular ministries. For instance, Coffee Bill, of course, managed the coffee and there was the man with the keys. Sally owned the distribution corner for those without homes, and then there was the recycling worker and many others. At Church for All People, the volunteers did not as much own a part of the program, although the un-loaders and distributors each owned the outside and inside portions of the

⁵ Russell, *Church in the Round*, 56.

⁶ Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 166.

program, and Dawn owned the orange juice distribution. As a group they owned the whole program, they expressed a sense that “we make this happen”, and took responsibility to teach me how it works. Both the food secure and food insecure volunteers talked about what they gain from the ministries. This project demonstrates Alinsky’s assertion that people who need material resources want to work *with* those who provide resources.⁷ Further, it supports his contention that being able to work supports a person’s dignity.⁸ In Chapter Four, I engaged Gutiérrez’s argument that dignity is a by-product of controlling one’s own work,⁹ thus shared ministry is voluntary, not a work requirement. In this project those who choose to volunteer felt ownership of the work they do.

The volunteers had ownership and authority in part because the top leadership held the rules of the programs very lightly. None of the key informants or volunteers pointed to a set of rules for the ministry, and most of the volunteers commented on the key informant’s decisions to not enforce rules. At St. Stephen’s and at Church For All People, each which had a director who was a detail person overseeing the day-to-day work, the volunteers identified the director as enforcing rules, and the key informant as ignoring the rules. Donna at Trinity Memorial needed to do both roles and that restricted the participant’s ability to run things themselves. Her interest was building relationships, but there were detail tasks that needed her guidance. She allowed some of the organizational activities, particularly at cleanup, to be disorganized to prioritize developing community. While volunteers at all three sites described being frustrated by the lack of rules, as an observer it was clear that this also passed authority to the volunteers. When the

⁷ Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*, 123.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 66.

sign said to take three of this item, it was up to the volunteer at that table, not the top leadership, to enforce the rule. They knew the direct manager would be strict in enforcing it, or the staff person would be lenient, and they called on the particular leader they wanted for support. Volunteers had the authority to ask participants to wait for their turn, to stop shouting, to put something back, and they had the authority to deescalate a growing fight, or to refer someone to the leadership to get special treatment. At Trinity Memorial one of the women decided how the table would be set and enforced her decision, another chose the beverages we would drink that night, and the leadership accepted these choices. At Church for All People, the director of Fresh Market had complete authority over set up and distribution, but individual volunteers were encouraged to use their knowledge their neighbors needs to adjust the amounts distributed. Volunteers used language such as “my” program or “our” program, and many described additional volunteering they do in other components of the sponsoring church. I explored in Chapter Four Gutiérrez’s view that people who need resources must be included in the decision-making about solving problems that poverty causes.¹⁰ At these shared ministry sites, the volunteer’s decisions were not changing the entire neighborhood, but they had real control over parts of the food ministry program. The lightly held rules created some uncomfortable chaos, but also gave authority to the volunteers.

It was evident that most volunteers brought skills and leadership to the programs. I have assumed that all volunteers are leaders, even if they are leaders of sweeping, or table setting, or another task defined by a supervisor. The volunteers I interviewed identified themselves as skilled, and as recognized for their skills, and those skills gave them a voice of authority and leadership in whatever area they volunteered. Volunteers, with and without food security, took

¹⁰ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 67, italics original.

the authority of their role very seriously. Coffee Bill really was able to get the leaky coffee maker to work correctly and from that he felt authorized to tell others how to use the coffee system, he surely felt supported if he stopped people from using it when they did not follow his rules. All of the women who choose to chop, cook and set-up the buffet at Chat and Chew did those tasks with skill. The volunteers at Fresh Market showed me the difference between a good and an almost rotten sweet potato, something I did not know before I worked with them. Both of the pantry directors were competent, able leaders, and both were food insecure. Among their skills was holding their authority lightly, as noted above, they each were able to leave most of the follow-through to the other volunteers. The volunteers I interviewed almost all described making decisions, some little decisions, some bigger, about their part of the ministry; they felt authorized to make those decisions. While many listed their experience with the program as the basis of their authority, some described past work and life experiences as giving them the knowledge and skills to be leaders. The research I explored in Chapter Two suggests that people with food insecurity are left out of serving because poverty is identified as an individual failing, which leads to stereotypes that people who live with poverty are without useful skills. Corbett and Fikkert were especially concerned that this creates a “god-complex” among the people who have material resources in direct service ministry.¹¹ What I saw was that people do have skills, and when food secure people volunteered alongside skilled food insecure people the food secure people recognized, and appreciated their neighbor’s skills. As Alinsky has said, many of the volunteers were “natural leaders,” people the local community recognizes as skillful.¹² In

¹¹ Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 65.

¹² Alinsky, *Reveille for Radicals*, 65.

Chapter Two, I shared Bouman's suggestion to see people as skilled rather than needy.¹³ These sites demonstrated that people who are food insecure have the skills to engage as volunteers.

Working Together is Not a Panacea

While working together was effective enough to be able to provide food for those who wanted it, having food insecure volunteers present did introduce problems. Simply running the ministries with huge numbers of volunteers was difficult. The programs with shared ministry prioritized having a position for everyone who wanted it. Sanctuary Angels and Chili Lunch, which were not shared ministry, seemed to prioritize efficiency instead. The two programs I visited with only, or mostly, food secure volunteers required less work, and had little waste. The shared ministries were chaotic. At Trinity Memorial, the difference between the quiet, reflective meal, cooked by two church members, and the noise and energy at the meal cooked by the participants could not have been more dramatic. At St. Stephen's, the chili lunch was much more efficient than the food pantry, and that efficiency ensured that people got their first serving before others got their third, that the rules were followed, and that people knew the rules. I cannot speak to whether all programs run by people with food security are efficient and organized, but I can say unequivocally that the sites with shared ministry I visited were chaotic and inefficient. In the shared ministry programs there were a few cases of friends of volunteers getting special treatment, but more broadly, not all of the volunteers could keep up with the pace of the program, or see the larger picture effectively enough to adapt to what was happening. This led to minor inefficiencies such as when items were not bagged ahead of time, so the line was held up, and to waste, as when several cases of frozen vegetables were forgotten under a table at St. Stephen's, and at Church For All People where several items were given in double the

¹³ Bouman, *The Mission Table*, 31.

numbers to volunteers, and thus were gone before the last groups were able to shop the pantry. This project cannot conclude whether there is a causal relationship between numbers of volunteers, or the food security of volunteers, and the efficiency of a food ministry program, but it would be interesting to learn more about the priority direct service programs place on efficiency.

The inefficiency and chaos created opportunities for volunteering. The goal of these ministries was to create many volunteer opportunities, rather than to find the most efficient way to distribute the resources. This is a form of conscientization because the volunteers have the opportunity to see themselves as contributing to solving the problem of hunger. With regard to the waste, it is important to remember that the food bank provides food that identified as waste by a food system that is designed to meet middle-class needs and make profits, rather than a system designed to equitably distribute food. Food banks gather leftovers, waste, and almost expired foods, and distribute these to people who have food insecurity. At St. Stephen's, all of the frozen vegetables that were thrown away were destined for the dump before the food bank accepted them as a donation. At Church For All People, the oranges donated were so old that we threw away a third before bagging and distribution. While improving efficiency and reducing waste are certainly values a ministry can choose to prioritize, shared ministry instead prioritizes making opportunities for people who want to volunteer.

My discomfort at observing the chaos, inefficiency and waste points to the way that shared ministry cannot be used to make food insecure people adopt middle-class values. Stivers notes that one of the ways we make food insecure people more middle-class is to require the ability to follow rules¹⁴ as a sign of being able to be disciplined and to able to work.¹⁵ Lupton

¹⁴ Stivers, *Disrupting Homelessness*, 83.

shows focusing on middle class values leads to gatekeeping, that is developing rules, rules about income and household size, but also cleanliness, having an ID, sobriety, as to who can receive the resources the charity is giving away.¹⁶ For the most part, these ministries avoided these middle-class markers to their programs, people were welcomed without limits to who could come. There was little paperwork, proof of eligibility, or other restrictions. However, there were some remnants of gatekeeping in the programs. The Fresh Market food pantry was funded by the local hospital's nutrition education program and so attendance at the half-hour workshop was mandatory. Chat and Chew was by invitation only, although the goal was to incorporate a few new people into the meal each month. And certainly part of Paul's effort to integrate the Chinese people into the food pantry community included instructing them on how to behave in ways the White and African American participants would find acceptable. The shared ministry sites I visited are taking seriously Russell's call to expand the leadership table by taking the voices of the margins seriously,¹⁷ but the pull on the ministry to move the volunteers toward a more middle-class set of skills, virtues, and values is quite strong.

While most of the volunteers had volunteer responsibilities they were good at, there were also many people who did not have the necessary skills for the tasks they were assigned. Ross, the man serving cookies at St. Stephen's hospitality station, did not have hospitality skills, even though he was aiming to be hospitable. Gwen at Fresh Market did not have organizational skills, and though she wanted to make the system work more smoothly, her contributions actually interfered with the distribution. In the crowded kitchen at Trinity Memorial it is not clear if the

¹⁵ Stivers, *Disrupting Homelessness*, 85.

¹⁶ Lupton, *Toxic Charity*, 52.

¹⁷ Russell, *Church in the Round*, 57.

uninvolved people in the kitchen did not have skills to do the work, or just lacked the self-confidence to step in and take on a role. While at Trinity Memorial there were people who signed up for the meal who actually did not do any work, it should be noted that at St. Stephen's and Church for All People, the volunteers made up around ten percent of the people who came to receive food, at Trinity Memorial it was one hundred percent of those invited who were to volunteer and only two or three of the twelve did not contribute in a way I could see. For the most part, the sites I visited gave little direction to volunteers and they did not seem to have training programs. This may be related to key informants lack of attention to detail, perhaps they did not recognize the details the volunteers were missing. At St. Stephen's, people mentioned some people being moved to more appropriate jobs, and I saw that with Ross being re-assigned away from interacting with shoppers. At Trinity Memorial, a woman with a disability found a task on her own that was one she could do. At Church for All people, Miss L. tried to get the work distributed during the unloading so that the women inside had tasks while the heavy lifting was happening, but she did not follow-through to be sure the tasks were done. While this made it so there were even more volunteer spots, such as the role of rovers to fix mistakes at St. Stephen's, it also is a sign of dysfunctional rescuing when people with power allow a person with less power to be assigned a task where they are likely to fail.

In planning this study, and even while observing the sites, I assumed that shared ministry was not just that there would be food secure and food insecure volunteers, but that those volunteers would work together. I even assumed that people would work with a person who has a different food security than they do. In reality this study does not show whether or not volunteers were interacting with others who were more or less food secure than they were. But it is important to point out that most of the volunteers at all three sites worked alone. There was

usually one person at a distribution table, one person chopping a vegetable, one person making dessert. In some cases two friends worked together, but in most cases even when working together each person took distinct tasks and did those tasks separately. Many people shared the work, but each task was done individually. Working together, but alone, does not require that people engage with one another on more than a superficial level. At Trinity Memorial and St. Stephen's, the volunteers also ate together and shared more with each other than. At Church For All People, the Fresh Market volunteers did not have a meal together (although there were other meals at the church) but they had worship together before the market opened. It was not the work alone that created the sense of community and belonging.

Working Together is an Effective Strategy

While there are many challenges to having shared work at a direct service food ministry, the benefits outweighed the problems. People wanted to volunteer, many had the skills needed to be volunteers, and all felt a sense of belonging and authority from their time working in the program. In Matthew 25:31-46, the nations are judged to be either sheep or goats based on their choice to provide food and other material resources to people who need them. Shared ministry is designed to give everyone the opportunity to be in service to each other. People do not feel like one of the in-group until they are invited to help with the work. That was the complaint of the widows in Acts 6:1-7, they wanted to be included in the work in order to be full members of the community. All of the sites had a strong sense of working together and of belonging to one another, to the program, at Church for All People and St. Stephen's, and to the church.

Shared Food Ministry Creates Church

This study was not set up to look for the components of church at shared ministry sites and yet there is evidence that church was present in all three locations. I was looking for

evidence that eating together created community, and evidence of rejoicing in the sense of recognizing small improvements as co-creators with God. I did not see a significant correlation of eating together with the sense of community, and yet there did seem to develop some form of church. In addition to creating interdependent community, these ministries were evangelical, in that they were always inviting new people in, and full of worship, art, and celebration. People volunteered at these programs to be refreshed and lifted up, as well as to care for others.

Eating Together

I argued in the summary of Part One that shared ministry aims to replicate the early church community by eating together and listening to one another. In observing the practice of the three sites, I did not observe anything that supports, or does not support, a significant connection between eating together and the creation of community. Although it is tempting to draw comparisons between Chat and Chew and Sanctuary Angels at Trinity Memorial, or between Chili Lunch and the food pantry at St. Stephen's, this research was not set-up in way to draw clear associations. There was not a significant difference between the sense of belonging between these programs despite the fact that two were traditional direct service model and two were shared ministry programs. This is not to say that people did not experience a shared sense of belonging, they did, but rather that it is unclear if the eating part of the program contributed to that feeling. While I would still suggest that eating together contributes to creating community, further research is required to make that point, and to make the case that it is measurably different in shared, as opposed to traditional direct service, ministry.

Witnessing Church

While volunteers at these food ministries mostly did not use explicit church language when they engaged with the people who needed food, I believe that I witnessed church. All of

the key informants connected what they were doing to creating church and to creating community. At Church for All People, Greg was explicit that Fresh Market food pantry is church among people who need material resources. One of the church's daily worship services was scheduled before the pantry opened, and when interviewed the volunteers included work they do for worship as one of the ways they volunteer at the pantry. But more than that, the actual experience of volunteering at Fresh Market is part of "doing" Church. Historically, Church for All People became a church when leaders of the Free Store clothing ministry recognized that community was developing and chose to organize that community as church. Since the church's founding, Church for All People has been a mission that created a church rather than a church that created a mission. All of the volunteers at Fresh Market described belonging to the ministry, and to the church, whether or not they attend worship services. At St. Stephen's this connection was less clear, but still present. While Paul described Clay Street Table as church, he did not emphasize connecting the food pantry to St. Stephen's. A large number of the volunteers I interviewed did make the connection. At St. Stephen's many food secure and insecure volunteers described themselves as members of the church, or active in the church, and several members of this very small congregation became members or participants as a result of their connection to Clay Street Table. Volunteers at both of these churches spoke highly of the other volunteers and stressed how important it was to support one another, some using typically Christian language.

The congregation at Trinity Memorial struggles with the idea of church being, rather than doing, evangelism and mission, but it is Donna's goal to help them get to that understanding. It is not accidental that a significant part of the Sanctuary Angels program at Trinity Memorial was silent reflection, and shared art making, both set up as spiritual disciplines. An early challenge for Donna was the way the church members saw the affiliated non-profits as separate from

church, but she described her efforts, including the creation of Chat and Chew, as a way to change that relationship. Interestingly, the women who cooked at Chat and Chew had a good understanding of Donna's goal, they recognized that the program is part of being church together, although they were not clear if the program belonged to Trinity Memorial or to the Welcome Church. The women I interviewed showed they cared for other volunteers by making sure I understood that those who did not contribute work had background that explained their behavior and by working together to solve transportation problems as we left the meals.

At all three sites people felt they had been welcomed in, and that it was part of their responsibility to similarly welcome others in. All three sites had a strong sense of belonging: belonging to each other, belonging to the leadership, and belonging to some form of church. Shared ministry was evangelism in the sense that people were welcomed into the community of God. As I explored in Chapter Four, for Russell mission is not a church project, but that structures of the church align with the struggles people experience.¹⁸ For Russell belonging grows out of justice-based hospitality where the roles of giving and receiving are shared by all,¹⁹ thus the working together described above is presumed to be a piece of creating belonging and a part of evangelism. Similarly, for Gutiérrez, the church is engaged in evangelism when it chooses to be on the side of the poor.²⁰ Finger goes so far as to suggest that meals programs may be the most authentic form of church because of the ways they cross class and racial boundaries in ways traditional church often does not.²¹ Her argument is that the *diakonia* identified in Acts 6:1-7 is not most importantly about serving the poor, but rather about how to incorporate more

¹⁸ Russell, *Church in the Round*, 94.

¹⁹ Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 20.

²⁰ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 69.

²¹ Finger, *Of Widows and Meals*, 281.

people into the church community.²² Interestingly, Sara Miles, in her description of the food pantry at St. Gregory of Nyssa suggests that her goal was to create a pantry that was church.²³

The shared food ministries I visited were inviting people in to a program that looks a great deal like church, a program where all are welcome, and once you have come in, you can belong, and are encouraged to welcome the next people.

All three programs had some signs of rejoicing, language Russell uses to describe joy and celebration, but also recognition of small successes and acknowledgment there is always more to learn, that God is still working on the community.²⁴ I saw celebration over a gratitude award given by the Chinese volunteers to Paul and Stephanie at St. Stephen's and recognition of personal successes by the Fresh Market volunteers at Church for All People. Chat and Chew meals were each a shared holiday celebration. At the same time, the key informants at each location were engaged in Russell's concept of appreciating God's continued creation as they evaluated each program honestly and looked for ways to improve their programs. This rejoicing component was small, but contributes to the sense that these ministries were creating church.

Developing Interdependence

This project revealed shared ministry communities developing a sense of interdependence among the volunteers. While the project did not include interview questions that point specifically to interdependence, as a participant observer I could see that each volunteer was dependent on the others, and appreciated that sense of dependence. Even when individuals worked alone, their work was connected to what others were doing. Thus the woman boiling

²² Finger, *Of Widows and Meals*, 256.

²³ Sara Miles, *Take This Bread*, 130.

²⁴ Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 49.

potatoes needed them washed and chopped by someone else, and the people setting the table were dependent on the women cooking to bring out the food at Trinity Memorial. At Church for All People, the physically weaker volunteers were dependent on the physically stronger ones to lift the largest boxes, and the distributors of food were dependent on the organizer to identify portion sizes. Drivers from St. Stephen's trusted that people were waiting to unload the pickup from the food bank and the director of the food pantry trusted the distributors to follow her directions. At all three programs, church members relied on food insecure volunteers to keep their ministry going, and food insecure volunteers were confident that their skills would be recognized and valued. In the interviews, volunteers named their assurance that people they worked with, and especially the key informants and pantry directors, would be available to help them if they were in trouble. Volunteers at Trinity Memorial described some of the other volunteers as close friends. In Chapter Four I engaged with Corbett and Fikkert, and Lupton's concerns that providing material resources through direct service ministry creates dependence. I concluded that the church's response to dependence is not independence but interdependence. Russell suggests we create interdependence by engaging in partnerships to work together.²⁵ Finger argues that the meals described in Acts 6:1-7 are a sign of interdependence, of people with and without material resources dependent on one another for meals.²⁶ McGowan says that those early meals were the standard way of gathering the church.²⁷ This project points to the possibility that shared ministry at food pantries and meal programs may be a way to build an interdependent community around food in this present day and age.

²⁵ Russell, *Household of Freedom*, 92.

²⁶ Finger, *Of Widows and Meals*, 232.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

Creating Church

The hypothesis laid out at the end of PartOne proposed that people in a shared ministry environment would eat together to create church. Instead the project witnessed creating church despite lacking significant conclusions about eating together. Church appeared to be created from the experience of working together, rejoicing, and engaging in worship and other spiritual disciplines. It included evangelistic sharing of a welcome to all who come. It appeared to be created out of a sense of interdependence, and a sense of belonging to one another. Perhaps it is related to being located in a church building. Because the study protocols did not explicitly define what church is, or look for specific church traits, I cannot draw broad conclusions. But at these three sites, it felt like shared ministry created church similar to that of the first century, where working together to care for one another created community.

This idea has been peripheral to this project and I have avoided addressing it directly. Finger's analysis of Acts 6:1-7 suggests that the meal gathering is church; I avoided crossing that line. Russell and Gutiérrez argue that ministries with the poor should not be programs but instead should be church. I have used Russell and Gutiérrez to argue that a shared food ministry should be evangelism, but avoided the next step of suggesting that the ministry is church. My results, however, point to the possibility that the line should be crossed, and that it can be said explicitly: shared food ministries create church.

Shared Ministry and Systems Change

Part One of this project argued that as people got to know each other across class boundaries shared ministry would lead to food insecure people being conscientized to the commonality of their experiences living with poverty, and that food secure people would be conscientized to the systemic causes of poverty. The idea was that knowing one another includes

learning each other's story, and that knowledge would contribute to building a community of solidarity that might engage in systems-changing activities such as community development or community organizing. Despite one small example of this behavior, on the whole this project suggests that this is unlikely. While individuals definitely learned to care for one another, volunteers did not show evidence of feeling commonality around class status, and indeed class status in most cases was not clear. At the same time, the racism that divided people from each other was significant, and the leadership at the one program that addressed oppression head-on spent his efforts dealing with that. Shared ministry, at the sites I visited, has not made a significant visible impact on systems change.

Missing Conscientizing and Solidarity around Class

I expected the significant conscientizing to be around class, but I was not conscientized enough to understand the vagaries of class. The questionnaire failed to give space to for interviewees to describe their class status in their own language and people in general seemed unwilling to identify themselves by whether or not they were food secure. It is noteworthy that I also never used that language in the interview. At Church for All People there was significant language around the fact that someone once needed the program, or that someone did not need the program but appreciated the ability to receive the material resources. While I met people who did not have homes, and who had not had a home for many years, food security was treated by those who mentioned it as a fluid-state, mentioning a specific need right now, or a past need that the volunteer remembered. Key informants pointed out individuals as food secure or insecure for interviewing and in some instances those individuals identified themselves differently during the interview. While this is in some part of a weakness research method, with a short time to build a trusting relationship in order to ask harder questions, it is more important to note that this points

to the larger challenge around the discourse on class in the United States. It is not clear that it is socially acceptable to identify as poor or as food insecure, and as long as that is not fine, it will be difficult for people living with poverty to find solidarity with each other.

One individual at St. Stephen's did share their critique of the systemic nature of poverty during interviews and John Edgar, pastor at Church for All People, told me about a community organizing event to get pre-natal care through the state funded insurance system. John noted that the church was able to contribute to the community organizing because of the depth of its relationships with the people the insurance affected: the law said it covered pre-natal needs, but the church knew many people whose coverage was delayed long enough to that it effectively was not available. The church joined an effort that changed the interpretation of the law. But John was clear that the church's contribution was relationship building not community organizing. The volunteers did not mention this action, nor consider it to be their reason for being part of this congregation, nor have any discussion of future actions the church might engage in.

Addressing Racism

The leaders of the ministries I visited were aware of, and concerned about, the systemic oppression of people living in poverty, and they handled the day-to-day effects of personal and interpersonal racism in their ministries on a regular basis. All three shared ministry sites mentioned these challenges in the key informant interviews and at Church for All People and St. Stephen's it was mentioned by volunteers. I could see the effects of racism as we worked together to distribute food. At Church for All People, race was noticed, mentioned, and discussed by volunteers from start to stop while I volunteered, and had a significant impact on the reactions of the Fresh Market volunteers to one another. It is not clear whether the leadership of Church for All People encouraged this open discussion, but no one seemed uncomfortable with it. At St.

Stephen's differences in race and language were constant topics for discussion. In interviews, many of the volunteers mentioned it, some as a challenge for the ministry to figure out how to be welcoming and one or two because they believed the Chinese American food pantry participants and volunteers were a problem for the ministry. Paul modeled the importance of learning people's names, and taking the time to understand what was being said as he pulled out his phone to use Google translate for interactions, and insisted that Anglo and Chinese volunteers talk face to face when they had conflicts. He repeatedly corrected anti-Chinese stereotypes. The conflict that arose reminds us that language and cultural differences can lead to unequal sharing. Shared ministry makes space for some of the minority population to move into leadership rather than asking them to adapt to the majority's way. At the food pantry at St. Stephen's, the response of inviting the people who speak Chinese into the volunteer circle was an example of working to prevent language differences from keeping people apart. In interviews and in my observations, I heard Paul's language of welcome repeated by the volunteers. They were clearly hearing what he was saying and trying to incorporate it into their actions. These little stories provide the possibility that shared ministry creates the foundations for engaging the challenge of racism but this project does not provide sufficient evidence to make that claim.

Drawing Conclusions

At the sites I visited I did not see any conscientizing of either people with food security or those without. While volunteers felt welcomed into the program, and that they belonged, without conscientization I cannot label that sense of belonging as solidarity. While in one location the leadership was motivated to engage in community organizing for the good of their volunteers, this was not expressed as a sign of an ongoing commitment to do this, and most of the volunteers did not seem to be aware of the community organizing effort. Perhaps the force of

racism separating people is greater than the strength of class-based common ground, but it is also significant that for the most part people did not identify themselves as food insecure. Thus race was a clear basis for discord in the community and similarities based on class were hidden. Key informants and many of the food secure volunteers seemed aware of the systemic causes of food insecurity, and some wished they could do more about it, but my project did not find evidence that engaging in shared ministry contributed to their knowledge. Paul's efforts at fighting racism was significant in influencing the volunteers' discussions about race and may be a model for other shared ministry sites attempting to deal with race-based oppression.

Opportunities for Further Research

This project introduces more ideas for further study than it draws conclusions. Simply repeating my descriptive study would be valuable, especially if repeated in a way that would take more time to get to know the participants and would develop better strategies to identify whether, and what type, of relationships are being formed across the boundaries of food secure and food insecure people. A repeat of the study, perhaps limited to just meals or just food pantries, could focus on following a few volunteers over a longer time frame, or could compare the comments of people who volunteer at a program with those that only receive services. At St. Stephen's or Trinity Memorial, a study could be developed to compare the programs where people are only served and the programs where people are encouraged to help with the work. Gardens are a new and popular ministry with churches today, it would be interesting to find one or two that are trying to become shared ministry and take part in visits over the entire gardening season.

As noted above, another approach would be to develop a project of what church might look like when centered around a food ministry, and then to repeat this study looking specifically for signs of creating church. It would be interesting to compare a meals program as church to the

new models of “dinner-church” that presently have a more middle-class, young-adult focus.

Using the work of Finger and McGowan, food ministries could be used to develop new insight into how commensality and Eucharist may have been carried out in the early church. It would be interesting to engage volunteers at a meals program or food pantry in a study of the sharing of resources in Acts 2 and the challenge of the widows in Acts 6:1-7 and to hear their understanding of the story.

Because I saw mostly people working individually, a repeat of my study might include specific questions and observations around working alone and working as teams. Is there a way that food insecure people are working together differently than food secure people work together? Or is this the same? Could volunteers learn to work together more effectively? And whether working individually, or together, are volunteers developing relationships that cross the boundary of food security? An interesting DMin project would be developing a leadership training for one of these programs and identifying whether this changed the skill level of volunteers, whether it influences the relationship building, or how it either encouraged or discouraged additional volunteering.

It would be interesting to further delve into the differences between programs, such as what work is mandatory or what work is expected of everyone, as in the Chat and Chew at Trinity Memorial, notwithstanding the meal programs where some who volunteer to work and others who choose to simply attend. I excluded Salvation Army sites from my research because of their faith and membership requirement for volunteers, but this is a program with a long history of including people in need helping to serve others in need. In addition, some shelter sites have a work requirement as a form of payment for the shelter services. It would be interesting to identify if “work requirements” have the same benefits as an “opportunity to volunteer”.

This study introduced me to the idea that there are people who describe themselves as someone who “used to need this program” and are returning as volunteers. Further study into whether this is common behavior, and whether many people who are food secure volunteers are doing this work out of thankfulness for getting out of food insecurity, or perhaps because they have a family member or friend struggling with food security. This might then turn into a study of food secure volunteers—what are their motivations for engaging in the ministry, how does their life story contribute to their experience as volunteers, and what do they gain from the experience of volunteering? How common is Corbett and Fikkert’s notion of developing a “god-complex”? A different study could compare food secure and food insecure volunteers, addressing similar questions. With background research on class identification, a study in this vein might determine if there is way to build class-based conscientization into shared ministry.

I met leaders of The Oregon Food Bank in Portland, OR who are instituting incentives for their affiliated food programs in order to encourage building relationships and involving the recipients as volunteers. It would be interesting to compare and contrast their umbrella of member programs, looking at which programs make moves toward shared ministry and how that decision changes the ministry or program. What challenges and benefits develop as programs change their procedures? What are the different strategies they use build relationships? Will church-based and secular programs have different experiences? Will any of those strategies be more effective than others at overcoming food insecurity in those neighborhoods?

All of the shared ministry sites I visited started with the importance of giving priority to people who do not have food security. More research could look at church’s can be supported and encouraged to create ministries where the food service is shared. Another idea is to engage in bible study and then use it as a basis for engaging in food ministry in new ways, driven by the

question of where one might find Christ in the local community. One might explore whether a church could be motivated to start a food ministry as a result of a study of how to find Christ in people who are hungry, thirsty, strangers, in need of clothing, visits, or in prison. Would a similar study of Finger's analysis of the early Christian commensality lead to a change of how churches work to build community with their neighbors?

John Edgar at Church for All People brought up a question I had not considered—should churches be leading community development and community organizing programs at all? He has led his church to join other movements, but argued that the work of church is building community, not neighborhood development. As I understand it, he is arguing for conscientizing people to the role systemic poverty plays in their lives, and for building solidarity because it is in solidarity that true community is created. Rather than leading social change, however, John is arguing for congregations to join social change actions that other groups lead. Church for All People is a leader in Asset Based Community Development, which focuses on people's skills, not their needs. It would be interesting to look more deeply at the role they have played in systemic change. When do they engage in the broader community development practices and when do they choose not to? What is the criteria for which parts of systemic change they decide to engage? How is the work of Church for All People similar or different from the ways that Gutiérrez encouraged involvement in systems change?

I have been approved for a Louisville Institute Pastoral Study Project grant to investigate how churches can *create* shared ministry. This study will re-visit some of the sites of my project, and some new sites, looking for the steps needed to make space for food insecure people to be volunteers, and how to encourage food secure people to sit down and eat with those who need the food. As part of that study, I will look specifically at where volunteers at food ministries see

themselves in terms of the Matthew 25 sheep and goats text. Do they see themselves as sheep, goats, or as the “least of these”? It will be interesting to see if there is a way to compare the variety of understandings of the story between people who volunteer and people who come to the program only to receive food.

PART TWO CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR SHARED MINISTRY

Part One of this project proposed five criteria for shared food ministry: to start with those who are food insecure, to eat together, to work together, to rejoice together, and to build efforts against class-based oppression. Two of these five criteria were evident in the sites I visited: starting with those who are food insecure and working together. This project does not make a significant contribution in favor or against eating together, but I suggest it remains a factor in shared ministry. The idea that shared ministry will lead to solidarity around class was not supported by my observations. In addition, this research suggests a potential new item: creating church together. Thus I propose four new criteria for shared ministry:

- *Shared ministry starts with the people who need material resources.* It starts with building trust, and listening for the needs and skills of people who need material resources.
- *Shared ministry gathers people to eat together.* It aims to build the commensality of the early Christian Church, where people who are food secure and food insecure eat together as part of building community.
- *Shared ministry makes space for people to volunteer to work together.* It prioritizes involvement of all who want to contribute over values such as order and efficiency. The leaders hold the rules lightly as a way to make space for individual volunteers to develop their authority.
- *Shared ministry builds a sense of church together.* It engages in spiritual disciplines, in worship, and in making it possible for participants to connect to the church. The ministry is evangelism, and invites people to belong. The church does not have a food ministry; the food ministry becomes church.

Starting with the specifically named needs of people who are food insecure and inviting people to be volunteers at the ministry had a significant impact on people's sense of belonging to both the ministry, and in some cases, the church that sponsored the ministry. People developed authority over particular areas of the ministry and were proud of the work they did to feed other food insecure neighbors. My effort to see eating together and rejoicing together as significant components of shared ministry was not supported by the findings of this project. While there was a small amount of rejoicing, the research instead may be pointing a less formulated concept of creating a community that felt like church. There were worship and spirituality components in each program, and the communities were motivated by a shared need to serve people who are food insecure. Because the research was not developed with a clear definition of what it would look like to be a church community, this finding will need additional research before significant conclusions can be drawn. The idea that shared ministry would create conscientization and build solidarity that could lead to creating social change was, in retrospect, a bold proposal, and the research does not point to this being a likely outcome. While further research would be appropriate, it does not seem likely that the work of running a ministry, organizing volunteers, and dealing with the issues of race between volunteers can easily incorporate the education and support that would be needed to build a class-based consciousness. It is possible that the sense of belonging and creation of church could lead to communities that are engaged in shared ministry might choose to join the community organizing or community development activities of organizations around them.

This final chapter offers many conclusions and possibilities for future research. Throughout this research, one concept is consistent in both the theory and practice of shared ministry. Shared ministry presents a significant improvement over direct service ministry,

making it so that churches can respond faithfully to the command from Matthew 25 to provide food to people who are hungry, yet avoid the problems that arise with direct service ministries

APPENDIX A: RESEARCH DOCUMENTS

PHONE INTERVIEW

1. Your program was referred to me by _____. I am doing research on food programs where the people who come to eat or to get food are also active in helping the program run—maybe they help with set-up or cleanup, or are part of the volunteer team or part of the planning and organization.

Do you think that your program does that? (If no: thank them for their time.)

2. If yes then: How many people who need resources are active in helping the program run?

What sorts of things do they do?

3. Would you be willing to have your program be part of my study? (answer questions as necessary). Tell me more about when you meet.
4. Let them know that I will be deciding which programs to study in the next few weeks and that I will let them know which ones I choose.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW

1. Tell me about your program. What do you love about it?
2. Tell me how it works to have a mix of food secure and food insecure volunteers?
3. How did you get into this way of running the program? Were there concerns expressed by the existing volunteers about going this direction?
4. What do you think are the benefits and weaknesses to your ministry?
5. Are there tensions between volunteers who are food insecure and people who are not? Are there tensions between eaters who are volunteers and eaters who are not?
6. Given my research, what do you think it is important for me to know about your program?

VOLUNTEER INTERVIEWS

1. Tell me about being part of this program. (Grand Tour)
2. What do you do as a volunteer? (Guided Tour)
3. How are the volunteers connected to each other?
(Do you know each other? Do you feel like the others know you? Do you feel like others love you? Do you feel like others recognize your gifts?)(Task)
4. How does volunteering here make you feel? (Feeling)
5. Who did you know in this program before you starting coming here? (include people who only eat/pick-up, not just other volunteers).

Who do you talk to when you come here?

Who do you usually eat with when you are here?

6. Tell me about the skills of the other volunteers—who are they and what are they good at?

SURVEY: The Theology and Practice of Sharing Ministry

Please mark which you feel is most accurate, the left item, the right item, or somewhere between the two items.

1. I am unknown in this program	1	2	3	4	5	I am known in this program
2. This program doesn't care about me	1	2	3	4	5	I am loved in this program
3. Most of the other volunteers don't care about me.	1	2	3	4	5	Most of the other volunteers care about me.
4. I don't have gifts/skills for this program	1	2	3	4	5	I bring gifts/skills to this program
5. Other volunteers here see me as only needs	1	2	3	4	5	Other volunteers here see my gifts/skills
6. I don't know people in this program	1	2	3	4	5	I have friends who volunteer here

7. What else should I know about how you are part of this program?

8. Age: Ethnicity or Race: Education: Employment:

9. What is your food security?

___ If I didn't have this program I wouldn't eat today or this week.

___ This program helps stretch my food budget.

___ I'm glad for the help I get here but I don't need the food.

___ I have enough food without this program.

___ I have plenty of food.

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM



Texas Christian University
Fort Worth, Texas

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title of Research: The Theology and Practice of Sharing Ministry with Those in Need

Funding Agency/Sponsor: None

Study Investigators: Dr. Russell W. Dalton and The Rev. Elizabeth M. Magill

What is the purpose of the research?

The purpose of this study is to describe food ministries where people who need food and people who have lots of food are both volunteers.

How many people will participate in this study? At each food ministry one person who is in charge, plus 6 volunteers will take part. I will look at three or four food ministries.

What is my involvement for participating in this study? You will answer questions about what it is like to work at this food ministry, who you know, and how you are treated as a volunteer. You will also fill out a survey.

How long am I expected to be in this study for and how much of my time is required? I expect our interview and filling out the survey to take about half an hour.

What are the risks of participating in this study and how will they be minimized? It is possible that you will feel anxious about what you are saying about yourself or about other leaders of this organization. You can decide what things you want to tell me and what things you want to keep private. There is a risk that someone may identify some of what you say as yours when they read my paper. In order to reduce that risk identifying details will be changed so that no one can connect you to the study results. Your name and identifying information will not be on the notes I take, but will be kept in a separate file. In addition I will take notes as we talk and will read back to you my notes so that you can change or adjust anything I've written down.

What are the benefits for participating in this study? Many food ministries would like to know how to create ministry that is shared. You will be contributing to research that will help others to create programs like this.

Will I be compensated for participating in this study? No.

What is an alternate procedure(s) that I can choose instead of participating in this study?

There is no requirement to engage this study.

How will my confidentiality be protected? I will assign your interview a number and will keep your name and the number on the interview in separate password protected files. In my research paper I will change the description of you, and any other identifiable information, so that people will not know that you are the person who answered questions. (If you want me to use your name and identifiers you may request that.)

Is my participation voluntary? Yes.

Can I stop taking part in this research? Yes.

At any time before the interview, during the interview, or after the interview, you can contact me and ask to not be included.

What are the procedures for withdrawal? You can withdraw at any time. You can ask me to remove you (Liz Magill at 508-450-0431, text or phone, or email pastorlizm@gmail.com) or you can contact my supervisor Dr. Russell W. Dalton at r.dalton@tcu.edu 817-257-6812.

Will I be given a copy of the consent document to keep? Yes.

Who should I contact if I have questions regarding the study? You can direct questions to me (Liz Magill at 508-450-0431, text or phone, or email pastorlizm@gmail.com) or you can contact my supervisor Dr. Russell W. Dalton at r.dalton@tcu.edu 817-257-6812.

Who should I contact if I have concerns regarding my rights as a study participant?

Dr. Dan Southard, Chair, TCU Institutional Review Board, Phone 817 257-6869.

Dr. Bonnie Melhart, TCU Research Integrity Office, Telephone 817-257-7104.

Your signature below indicates that you have read or been read the information provided above, you have received answers to all of your questions and have been told who to call if you have any more questions, you have freely decided to participate in this research, and you understand that you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

Participant Name (please print): _____

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

Investigator Name (please print): _____ **Date:** _____

Investigator Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C: PROGRAMS CONTACTED FOR INTERVIEWS

MEALS

- St. Steven's Episcopal Church, Pittsfield, MA
Some food insecure people help with clean-up, but unlikely to find 2 or 3 to interview.
- Trinity Memorial Episcopal Church, Chat and Chew/Sanctuary Angels, Philadelphia, PA
Women with food insecurity cook for themselves one night, are served the next.
- Tenth Presbyterian Church Presbyterian Church In America, Philadelphia, PA
May have 3 or 4 volunteers who were once food insecure,
cannot volunteer until join church
- Feeding our Friends at First Christian Church, DOC, Granbury, TX
Shared distribution, but only one or two food secure people involved in that sharing
- St. Vincent's Catholic Church, Escanaba, MI
Some people who sort clothing eat at the meals program but it is not encouraged.
- Salvation Army, Escanaba, MI: Yes, believers who join church can volunteer.
- Saturday's Bread, Oneonta, NY
Shared ministry but no longer affiliated with UMC.
- Brighton-Allston Congregational Church, UCC, Brighton, MA
Shared meal is part of coffee hour after church. No reply from leadership
- St. Andrew's Episcopal Church Meals Program, Westford MA
They visit another church's meal program and visit with people who are eating.
- In the Garden Ecclesia Ministry/Episcopal, Columbus OH.
No reply.
- Supper Club at the Paulist Center, Catholic, Boston, MA
Informant reports the ministry is not shared.
- Bay Area Campus Ministry St. John's Episcopal Church Escanaba, MI
Students do not shared in the work.
- St. John's Catholic Church Worcester, MA
Shared ministry but I already know more than half the participants.
- MANNA at St. Paul's Episcopal Cathedral, Ecclesia, Boston MA
Visited for an earlier project, shared with small number of food secure people.

FOOD PANTRIES

Clay Street Table at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Portland Oregon
Many shared workers

Fresh Market at Church for All People UMC Columbus, Ohio
Many shared workers

Food Pantry at St. Vincent's, Escanaba, MI
Some volunteers with disabilities and food insecurity use the meal program.

Food Pantry at Brighton-Allston Congregational Church, UCC, Brighton MA
Did not reply to request for information.

GARDENS

Community Harvest Project and St. Andrews Episcopal Church, Grafton, MA
Not shared, church is volunteer not sponsor of ministry

Community Gardens at First Christian Church, DOC, Granbury, TX
Not shared although some people who need food have a plot

Project-44, Acton UMC, Granbury TX
Goal is to be shared, many people who need food come in fall, some in spring

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