

Lessons From the Least:

Engaging Presbyterians in the Strategic Work of Understanding, Preventing and Eradicating Poverty.

By Rev. Dr. Alonzo T. Johnson and Margaret Mwale



PRESBYTERIAN COMMITTEE ON THE
**Self-Development
of People**

Presbyterian Committee on the Self-Development of People (SDOP)



**COMMUNITY
BROCHURE**



**CHURCH
BROCHURE**

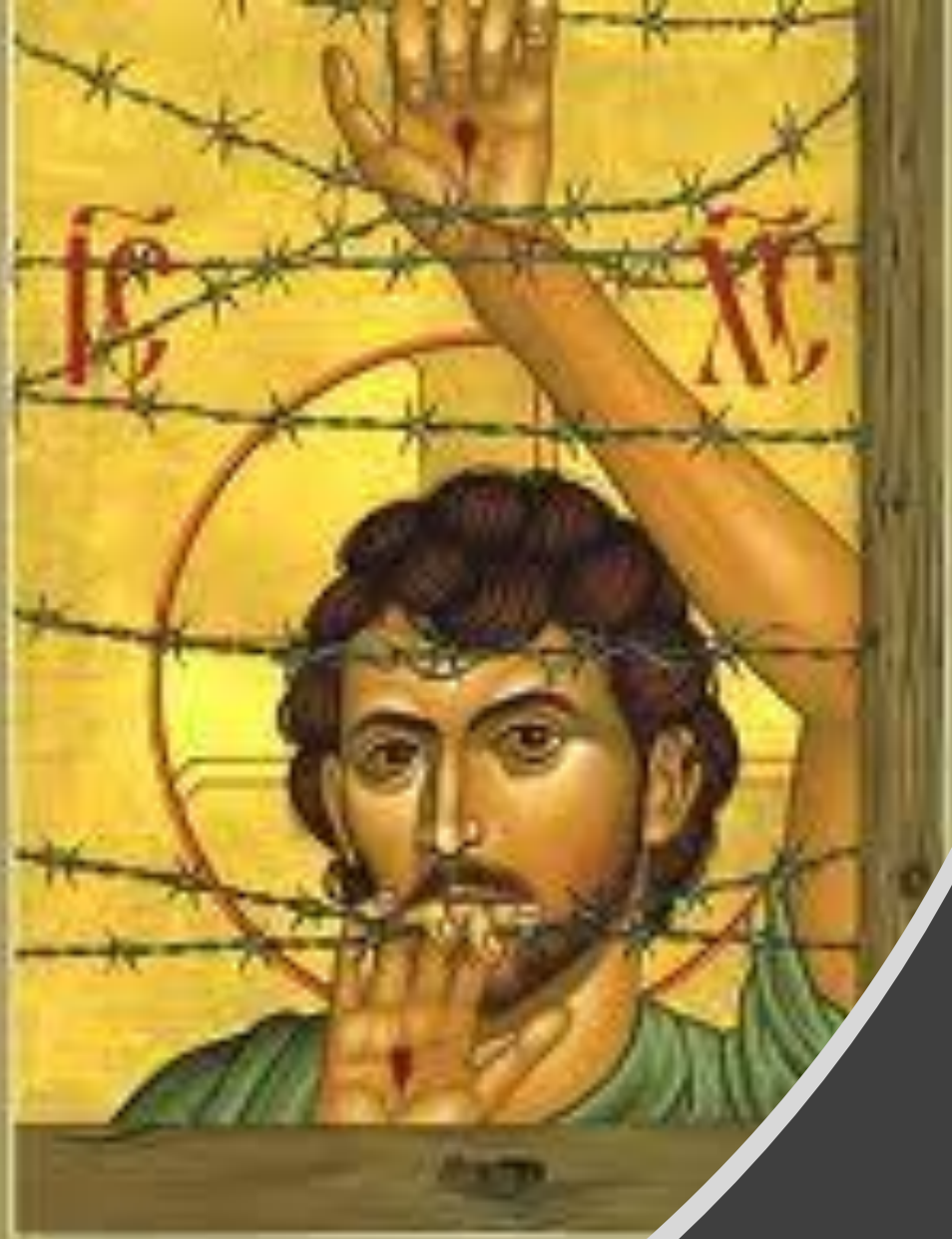


WEBSITE

A dark, overcast street scene in a residential area. The street is paved and has some utility poles with wires. There are buildings on both sides, some with balconies. The overall atmosphere is gloomy and somewhat desolate. The text "Poverty Biography" and "Activity" is overlaid in white.

Poverty Biography

Activity



Based on the Matthew 25 text, where in your context do you see the face and the plight of Jesus?

When was the first time you ever heard The word poor? How old were you? What was the context? Or What did “poor” look like to you?





**Why do you think
poverty exists?**



As a church, what challenges do you think we face in eradicating poverty in our current times?


Why are People Poor?

Root Causes of Poverty

- **Discriminatory practices**
- **Quality, sustainable jobs**
 - **Affordable housing**
- **Lack of Decent and affordable healthcare**
- **Lack of Reputable financial products/credit**
 - **Lack of Education/training/skills**



CPJ's Five Elements of Eradicating Poverty:

- 1. PCUSA Biblical, Theological & Ecclesial Understanding of Poverty**
 - 2. Intersectional and Root Causes of Poverty**
 - 3. Centrality of Community Organizing, Public Policy & Advocacy**
 - 4. Developing non-paternalistic Relationships**
 - 5. Generosity Expressed in Partnerships**
- 



Some Ideas About Poverty

- **Poverty is difficult to define and encapsulate in one sentence.**
- **Poverty is complicated, contextual and complex but affects all areas of life (i.e. physical, personal, social, cultural and spiritual)**
- **Poverty in development terms over the years has been defined as deficit, entanglement, lack of access to social power, powerlessness, lack of freedom etc. (From Walking With the Poor, Bryant Myers, Orbis Books).**
- **David Korten refers to poverty as Capacity Deprivation**
- **Matthew Desmond defines poverty as a lack of choices as well as a lack of resources.**

What is “systemic” poverty?

- **Systemic poverty refers to the economic exploitation of people who are poor through laws, policies, practices and systems that perpetuate their impoverished status.**

Eradicating Poverty is about Freedom

Freedom is both the goal and the means to human development. The goal of development is to create the environment and conditions within which all people have the freedom to seek the better human future they desire. Freedom is the means of development in two ways:

- **First, the poor themselves must be the actors if their capability is to be increased.**
- **Second, we must support the poor in removing impediments to their being actors and making choices, things that Sen calls “unfreedoms.”**

The federal poverty line (FPL) for 2025 is defined as follows:

- **For a household of 1: \$14,580**
- **For a household of 2: \$19,720**
- **For a household of 3: \$24,860**
- **For a household of 4: \$30,000**

• **Federal
Definition Poverty level is the set minimum amount of gross income that a family needs for food, clothing, transportation and shelter.**

**The Three R's of Collective Power
in Doing Missional Poverty Eradication:**

Righteousness

Relationships

Resources

**This is wisdom we have learned from our
communities and our work together.**



The background features an open book with Hebrew text, overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. Two decorative circular elements, resembling ancient coins or seals, are positioned on the left and right sides of the book. The text is centered and rendered in a white, gothic-style font.

Righteousness
and Justice,
the Biblical Foundations
(Tzedakah)

צְדָקָה

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- The background of the slide features a soft-focus image of an open book with a scroll resting on it. A glass of water is visible in the bottom right corner. The text is overlaid on this background in a bold, black, sans-serif font.
- **Modeled by God in Israel's experience**
 - **“Moral life is never a matter of individual character and conduct but is to be located and held accountable by the local community.” -Bruce Birch**
 - **Covenant undergirds this notion of justice which means we live in community with God and with one another. Interpersonal, economic (Jubilee), called to be an alternative community.**

**Justice
Righteousness**

**Walter
Brueggemann
connects
righteousness to
shalom by
emphasizing that
shalom is relational
and relational
justice. He argues
that righteousness
involves putting
substance into the
claims of shalom,
which is about
moving others
towards well-being
and social equity.**

**Shalom
wholeness**

Righteousness calls us to Advocacy

The Lord's Supper enacts and seals what the Word proclaims: God's sustaining grace offered to all people. The Lord's Supper is at once God's gift of grace, God's means of grace, and God's call to respond to that grace. Through the Lord's Supper, Jesus Christ nourishes us in **righteousness**, faithfulness, and discipleship.

Through the Lord's Supper, the Holy Spirit renews the Church in its identity and sends the Church to mission in the world.

Book of Order W-3.0409



**Advocacy is part of who
we are and it is interwoven
in our sacraments**

PC(USA) Policy Statements on Poverty

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/compassion-peace-justice/acswp/>



Covenant

Covenant is the name for human community defined by the individual's commitment to the well-being of all within the community. Covenant is the context in which individuals flourish in community as one family. In the covenant community, the organization of society is based on our recognition that we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, and they are ours. We acknowledge that *shalom*, the peace that grows out of our just and loving relationships with one another and God, is rooted in our actual interconnectedness and interdependence.

From: LIVING THROUGH ECONOMIC CRISIS: THE CHURCH'S WITNESS IN TROUBLED TIMES

**Approved by the 219th General Assembly (2010) Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Developed by The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP)**

What some of our PCUSA Policy says about Poverty

From Hope For A Global Future: Toward Just and Sustainable Human Development (208th General Assembly 1996)

Acute poverty has many causes. It is in part a consequence of each country's history, such as colonial exploitation, sometimes compounded by domestic ethnic rivalry and the failure of unifying national leadership. Even where adequate resources are potentially available to satisfy basic needs, such factors as corruption, political instability, tyrannical governments, economic mismanagement, control of economic resources by elite minorities, excessive military expenditures, ethnic conflicts, civil wars, high population growth, poor education, and cultural customs such as the subordination of women, have contributed significantly to impoverishment





**World of Hurt, Word of Life: Renewing God's
Communion in the Work of Economic Reconstruction
(220th General Assembly 2012).**

Increased social investment in poorer communities, through measures such as expanded and enriched public schooling (longer school days and/or school years, incorporating high-quality enrichment programs), policies that improve transit equity in under-served cities and rural areas (including mass transit and rail upgrades), measures to restore healthy housing markets and well-managed public housing, and policies and funding to help cities and states develop and expand community-based crime prevention programs and alternatives to prison.

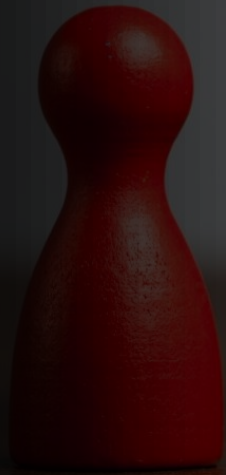
Righteousness is about Right and Just communication

- Be mindful of language used to describe the communities you wish to partner with.
“communities of need,”
“cultures of poverty ”and the connotation/assumption behind these terms and ideas**





Relationships (Indaba)



**Ted Talk: The Danger of a
Single Story
Chimamanda Ngozi
Adichie**



**There is no one way,
no one story, we are
made up of a
kaleidoscope of many
different stories.
This is the beauty and
artistry of creation.
This is the beauty of
our communities**

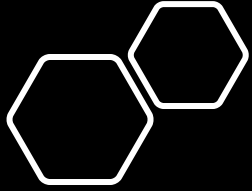


DNA Story for Alonzo

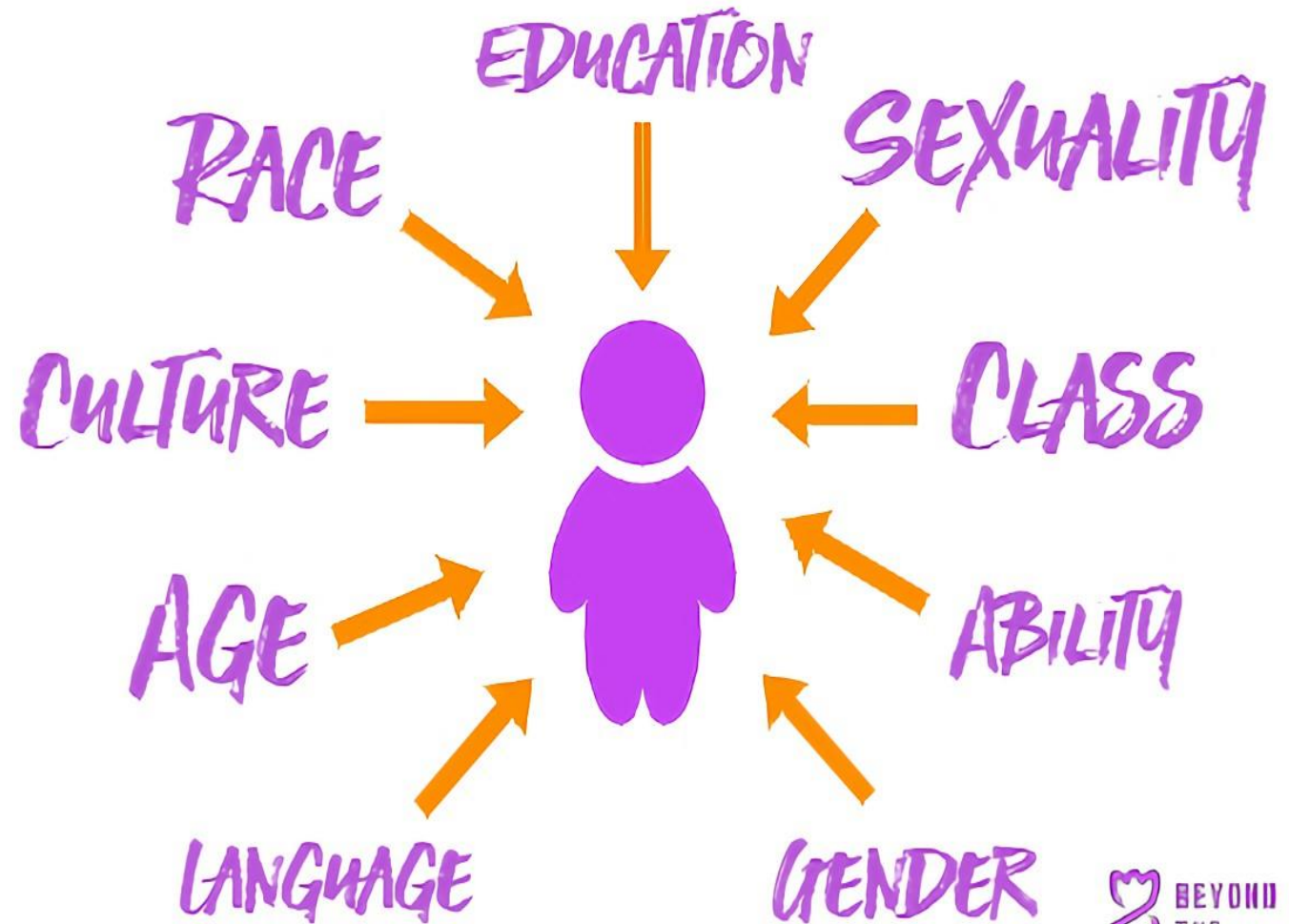
ancestryDNA®

Ethnicity Regions

 Nigeria	48%
 Cameroon, Congo & Southern Bantu Peoples	30%
 Mali	10%
 Ghana	3%
 Senegal	2%
 Norway	2%
 Sweden	2%
 Germanic Europe	1%
 Southern & Eastern Africa Hunter-Gatherers	1%
 Eastern Europe & Russia	1%



Intersectionality - the interconnected nature of social categorization such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given: Individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.



Intersectionality

Race

Housing

Hunger

Poverty

Education

Gender

Jail



There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives.

Audre Lorde





Creating Relationships

- **Go to where the communities you desire to engage with are, i.e. go to the people**
- **Learn the local culture (What is culture?)**
- **Educate yourself about the issues in the community**
 - **Intentionally seek out locals to partner with in leading the relationship building**

Robert Lupton - Toxic Charity
Dambisa Moyo - Dead Aid
Corbett/Fikkert - When Helping Hurts
Decolonizing Wealth - Edgar Villanueva
Elizabeth Hinson Hasty - The Problem With Wealth

- **One-way giving which objectifies the poor**
- **Creates unhealthy co-dependent relationships**
 - **Neo-colonialistic - Paternalistic**
- **Concern about development, empowerment and not human services**



**“NOTHING
ABOUT US
WITHOUT
US!”**

**“IF YOU ARE
NOT AT THE
TABLE, THEN
YOU ARE ON
THE MENU!”**



- **Advocacy is not a one and done**
- **It is not done outside community**
- **How can we see anti-poverty advocacy as working in partnership and solidarity**



•Thick Listening

**“The first duty
of love is
listening”
– Paul Tillich**

Cultural Competency, Diversity and Inclusion

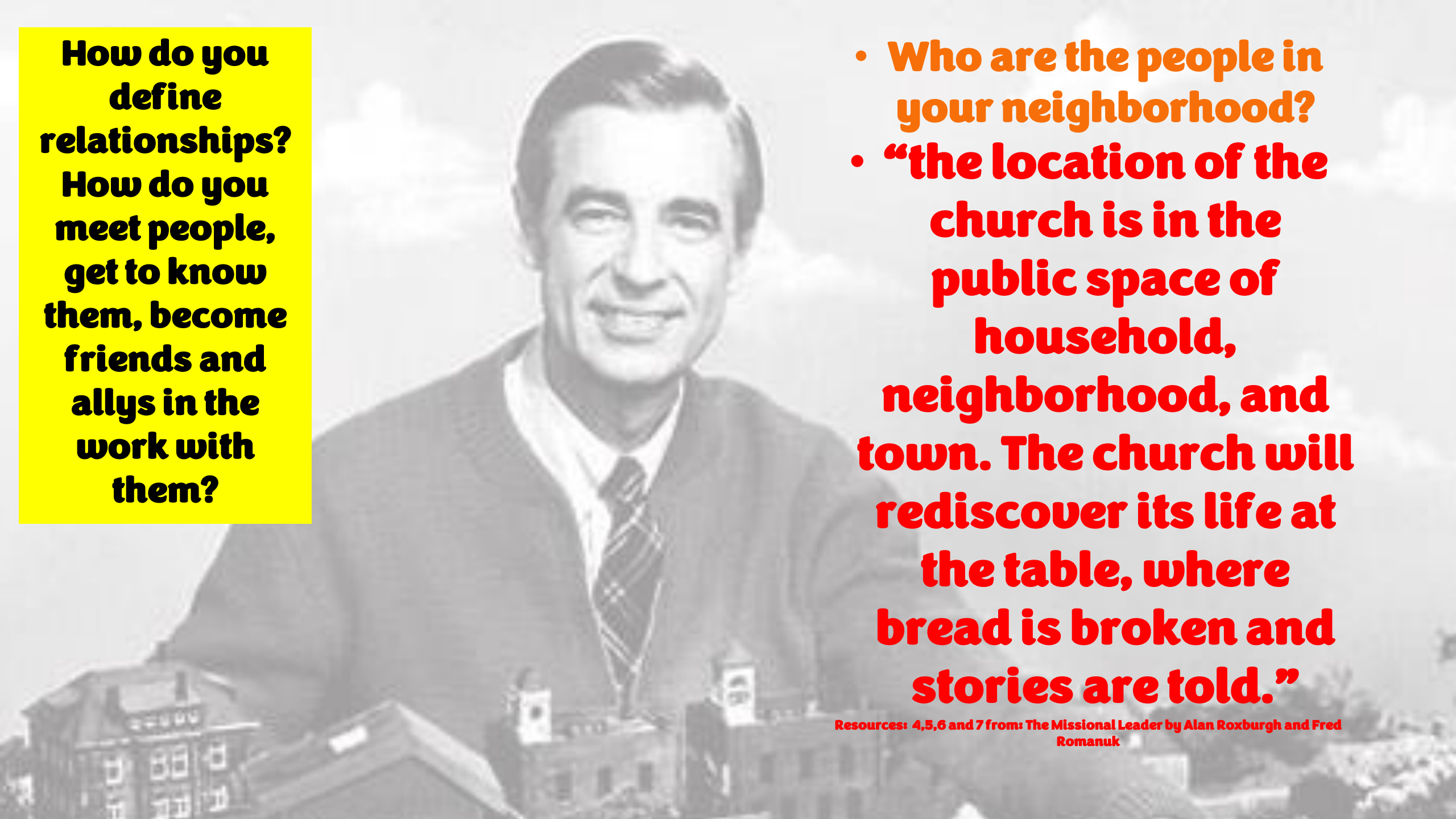
The Dos:



- **Listen carefully to what local people are articulating as their problems. Educate yourself on the issues!**
- **Engage their own thoughts on possible solutions;**
- **Test your pre-meeting assumptions;**
- **Create an environment where people feel they can speak freely;**
- **Respect local traditions and hierarchy (even if they seem strange)**
- **Focus on sustainable solutions**

The DONTs:

- **Do not assume that people do not understand their problems and possible solutions**
- **Do not patronize them**
- **Do not involve yourself with creating a solution with on-going dependency**
- **Do not appear program/project focused rather than solution focused.**



**How do you define relationships?
How do you meet people, get to know them, become friends and allies in the work with them?**

- **Who are the people in your neighborhood?**
- **“the location of the church is in the public space of household, neighborhood, and town. The church will rediscover its life at the table, where bread is broken and stories are told.”**

Resources: 4,5,6 and 7 from: The Missional Leader by Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk

Resources

A close-up photograph of several hands of different skin tones stacked together in a circle, symbolizing teamwork and collaboration. The hands are positioned in a way that they all meet at a central point, with fingers slightly overlapping. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue. The text 'What We Got! (The Strategies)' is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font on the lower left side of the image. Below the text is a solid orange horizontal bar.

What We Got! (The Strategies)

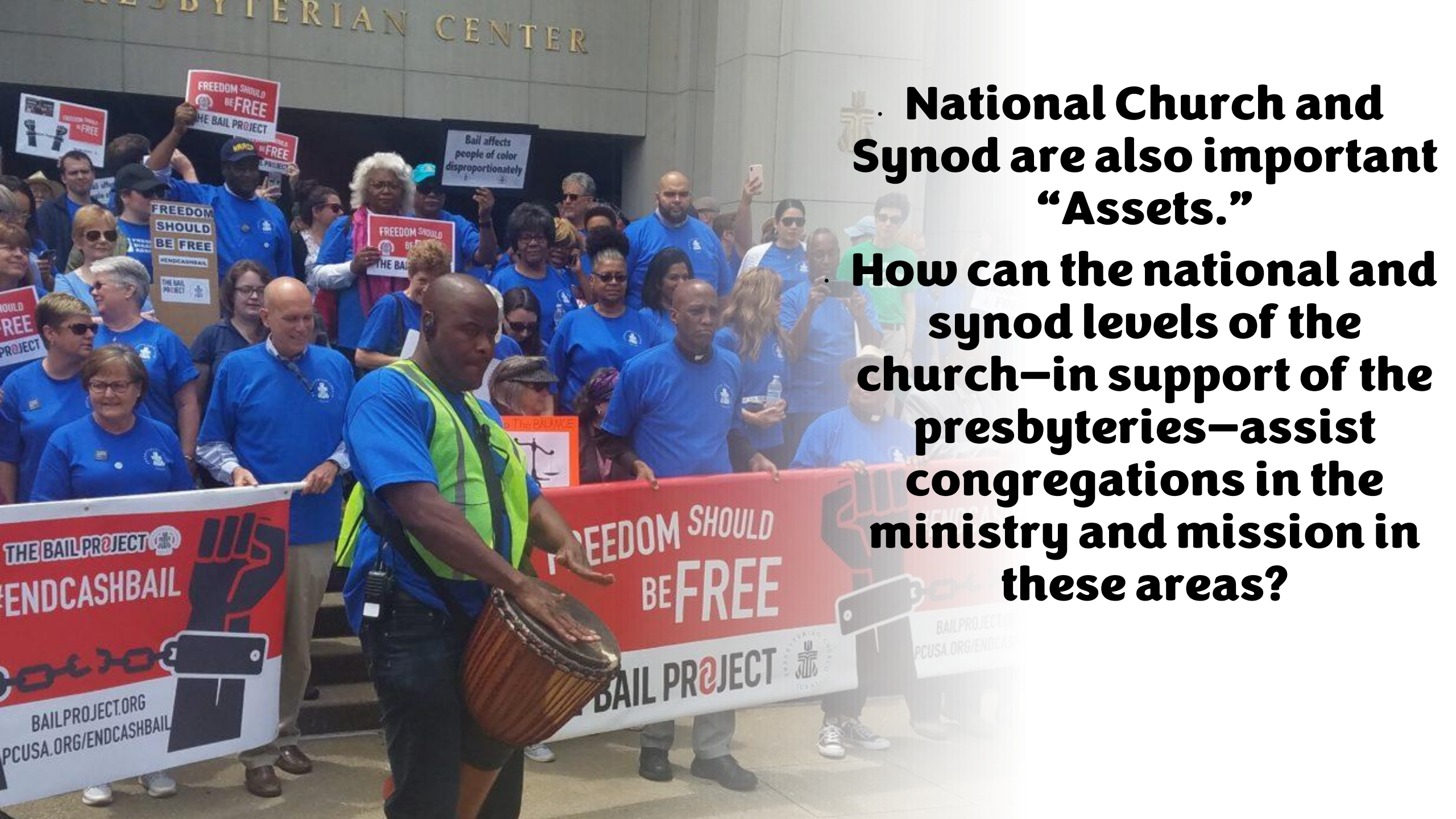
Asset Mapping: What Do You Have?

- **The idea of asset mapping comes from Luther Snow from the Alban Institute. The idea is to take stock of the many things you DO have as a congregation**
- **Often times, the news of the day teaches us that we live in scarcity rather than abundance. This is an opportunity to examine the ways we are blessed and the ways we can bless others.**
- **What are your assets?**



Asset Mapping Exercise

- **Physical Assets**
- **Individual Assets**
- **Associations (yours and your congregation's)**
- **Institutions**
- **Economic Assets**



· National Church and Synod are also important “Assets.”

· How can the national and synod levels of the church—in support of the presbyteries—assist congregations in the ministry and mission in these areas?

Priesthood of all Believers

We Got Each Other!

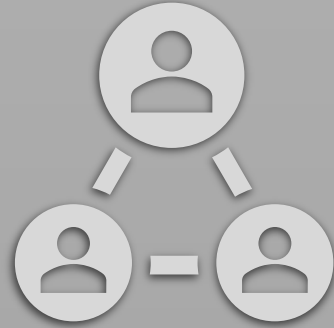


**The reality of the congregation as a
spiritual and pastoral community.**

- **What Can You Do**
- **What Do You Have?**
- **Kenosis - emptying,**
- **'self-emptying' of Jesus' own will and becoming entirely receptive to God's divine will.**
- **God also entering the stuff of the world to transform brokenness into blessing (Kent Ira Groff, Soul of Tomorrow's church. P.94)**



SPIRITUALITY



LEADERSHIP



DISCIPLESHIP



EVANGELISM

Matthew 25 poverty engagement

Response

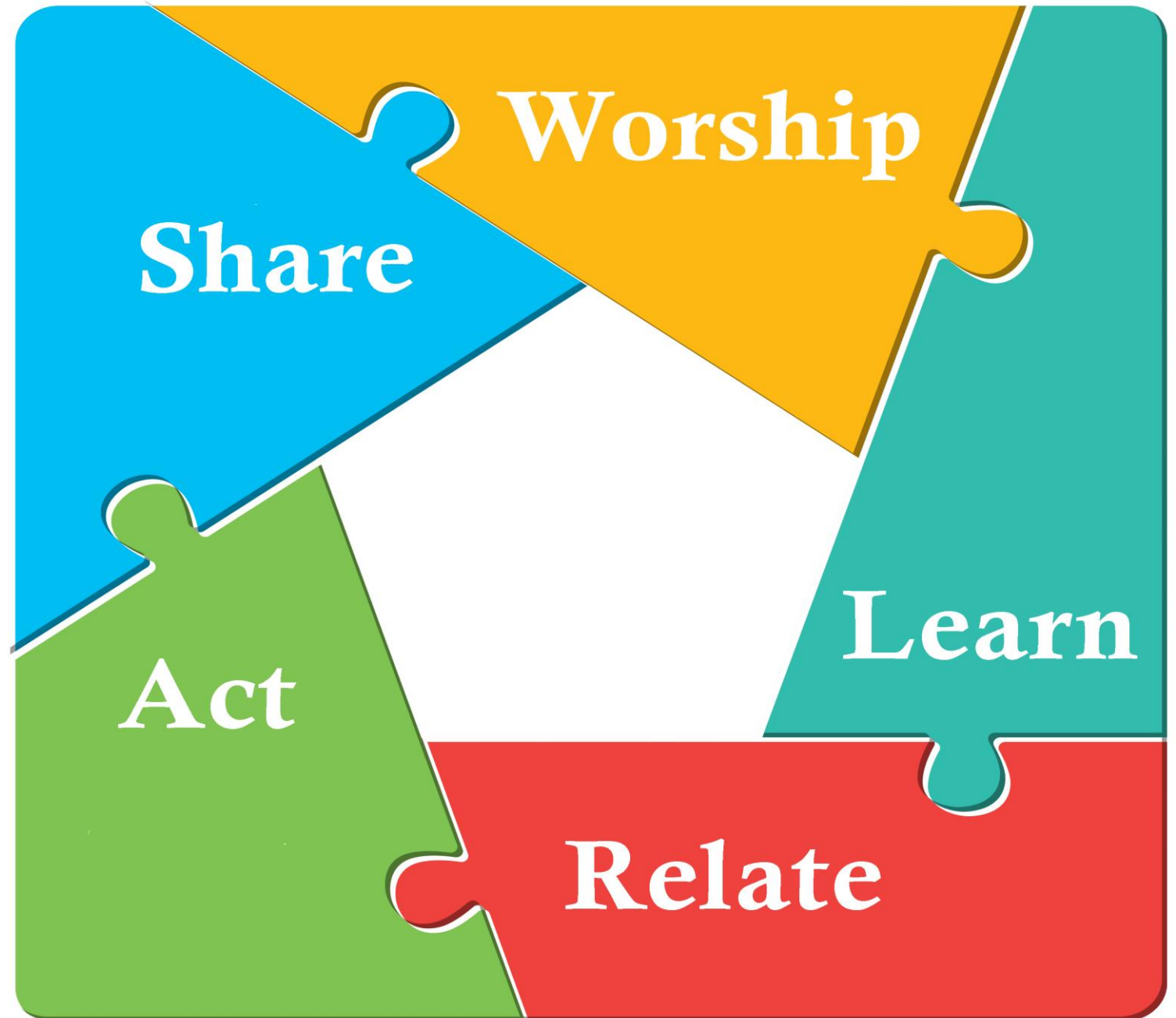
FIVE INTERSECTING SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

CORE PRINCIPLES:

Be present with, listen to, and be led by those who live in impacted communities.

Seek equity and diversity in leadership.

Learn about systems, structures, and practices that perpetuate poverty.





**“We are only a
healthy
community if
we are taking
care of
everybody”**

**Edgar Villaneueva,
Decolonizing Wealth**

Envisioning Outcomes



- **Goals/desired outcomes**
- **Mutual Dependence – reciprocity is an ongoing relationship**
- **What should you be looking for?**

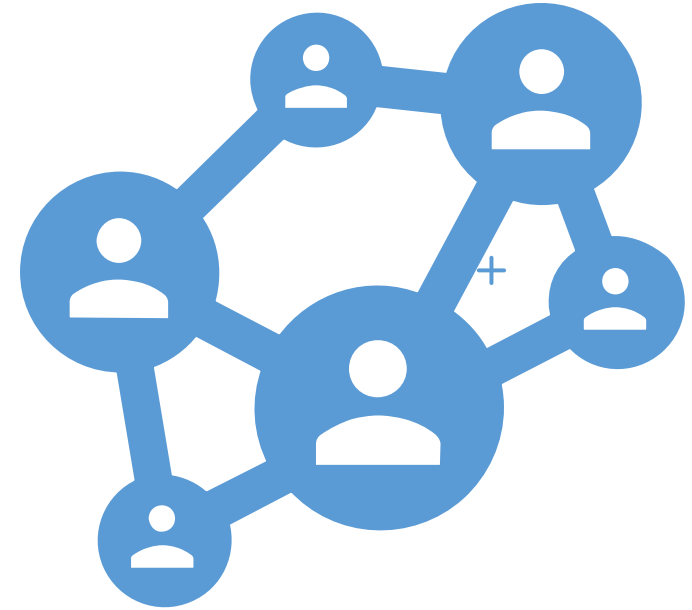


**How can we see
mission
and ministry
as partnership
and
relationship ?**

The Power of Invitation

• **Invitation** is not only a step in bringing people together, it is also a fundamental way of being in a community. It manifests the willingness to live in a collaborative way. This means that a future can be created without having to force or sell it or barter for it. When we believe that barter or subtle coercion is necessary, we are operating out of a context of scarcity and self-interest, the core currencies of the economist.”

— Peter Block, [Community: The Structure of Belonging](#)



Act: We prioritize listening to, and responding alongside, communities as they identify needs, organize for solutions and engage in advocacy for change.



Women's Empowerment

Why Not Prosper Inc. | Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
www.why-not-prosper.org

- **W-5.0304**: *Justice and Peace*
 - God sends the Church to **work for justice** in the world: exercising its power for the common good; **dealing honestly** in personal and public spheres; **seeking dignity** and freedom for all people; **welcoming strangers** in the land; promoting justice and fairness in the law; overcoming disparities between rich and poor; **bearing witness** against systems of violence and oppression; and **redressing wrongs** against individuals, groups, and peoples.
 - God also sends the Church to **seek peace**: in the Church universal, within denominations, and at the congregational level; in the world, where nations and religious or ethnic groups make war against one another; and in local communities, schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, and homes.
- (Book Of Order)**





What can you do/are already doing?

How can we be more collaborative?

- **How can we resource you?**
- **Separately, write down what you plan to commit to do when you get home.**

Call to Action Compassion, Peace and Justice
(PCUSA):

Self Development of People

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance

Presbyterian Hunger Program

Office of Public Witness

Presbyterian Mission at the United Nations

Educate a Child Transform the World

“We are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself.”

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer

“If you are silent about your pain, they’ll kill you and say you enjoyed it.”

— Zora Neale Hurston

Damayan Migrant Workers Association Case

(Self-Development of People Partner)

Slavery in Domestic Worker Industry

- **Women migrants mostly from Philippines**
- **Damayan empowers low-wage workers to fight for their labor, health, gender, and immigrant rights.**
- **Seeks to build leadership at the grassroots level to eliminate labor trafficking, fight labor fraud and wage theft, and to demand fair labor standards to achieve economic and social justice. Damayan is a Filipino word that means “helping each other”**





Questions and discussion
