



We are Called
TO HEAL. TO UNITE. TO JUSTICE.

Team Reflection

No. 2 Death Gap – Poverty is more than Economic

Dedicating a month to minority health is a step to understanding and unraveling the systemic structures that play an enormous role in the gut-wrenching disparities in health care and human flourishing. Physician researcher David Ansell called attention to the glaring differences in health and life expectancy between neighborhoods in the same city. His 2017 book *The Death Gap: How Inequality Kills* draws upon research in Chicago that revealed a 16-year difference in life expectancy along a mere five mile stretch of the city's famous "L" train system. People living in downtown high-rises have a life expectancy of 85 years, and just a few stops directly west on the public transport line, life expectancy drops to 69 years. The stark differences are present in cities across the nation.

Religious scholars have also reflected on the glaring differences between those with many resources and those with fewer. Years before Ansell's book, Fr. Daniel Groody, CSC, professor at the University of Notre Dame, wrote how the poor are *those who die before one's time!* [2.1] The experience of being poor is so multidimensional and layered with complexity that it cannot be conflated with mere economics. Fundamentally, those who are poor experience far fewer options and opportunities in many aspects of life.

Fr. Groody and theologians in the social tradition ground a vision for a more just society in the scriptures. The book of Deuteronomy, from the Hebrew Scriptures, envisions caring and enabling those who are poor. "If there are poor among your siblings ... do not harden your heart or close your hand toward them, but open your hand and lend whatever they need. ... Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart. (15:7-8, 10).

There is so much that is needed for us to give and to change the structures around us. May the challenges before us never obstruct our efforts to keep hands and hearts open.

Consider

- Do I see those whom I serve and care for as my sister and brother? What feelings do I notice when I think about others in this way?



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- Can I imagine opening my hands and heart to someone I might care for / work with today? What might that look like?

Let us pray together,

God of all peoples, you created all of us from the depth of your love and delight in each one of our sisters and brothers. May your divine care enfold us in our poverty. May your grace soften our hearts, enlarge its concern for our neighbors in need and open our hands to remove the barriers that keep everyone in our community from flourishing in fullness.

[2.1] *The Option for the Poor in Christian Theology*, edited by Daniel G. Groody, University of Notre Dame Press, 2007, p. 6.