



GOING DEEPER: Moving the church toward a prophetic, transformational, collaborative and contextual response to child poverty.

We believe child poverty is our greatest failure as a civilized nation. Nearly one-fourth of North Carolina children live below the poverty line; many more come from low socio-economic homes. Children impacted by poverty are often hidden, living in rural areas and high poverty neighborhoods. The Church often fails to respond in transformational response because we do not see the challenges in our daily lives. Yet the impact of poverty will ultimately be felt by all. Failure to understand the impacts of poverty and to respond to it will lead to poverty impacting our community and our own lives. Our lack of response to the impoverished will not remain hidden.

We believe there is a profound relationship between poverty and literacy. Poverty can negatively affect a child's cognitive development and academic performance. Over 40% of North Carolina's children are not proficient readers by third grade; 74% of 3rd graders who read poorly struggle in ninth grade; reading on grade level by the end of third grade is one the best predictors of high school graduation; 85% of all juveniles who interface with the juvenile court system are functionally low literate; 75% of prison inmates are high school dropouts.

We believe the church is called to be the prophetic voice on behalf of children impacted by poverty. Our Wesleyan tradition calls on the United Methodist Church to remember our theological history and commitment to transformational response. The church is called to be in mission with God beyond the church walls in responding to this crisis.

We believe transformation of the world comes through transformation of the church and that transformation of the church must take place before we can effectively seek transformation in a hurting world. Transformational change begins from within; therefore, our purpose is to follow God's lead in empowering the Church in response. This begins by developing small group grounded in contemplative prayer practices and equipped in leading the church and community to understand the challenges faced by children impacted by poverty and ultimately leading to appropriate contextual response.

We believe collaboration is imperative. Silo driven systems of support for children are not changing outcomes. There are other churches, organizations, businesses, and individuals in every community who also hear the call. Our hope is to bring these voices together or to join where collaboration has already begun in collective transformational response.

We believe response must be contextual based on the needs, gifts, and resources of the given community. No two communities, schools, churches are exactly alike; therefore, the collaborative must diligently seek a response to the challenge of child poverty that meets the needs of the community.

We believe that when we seek God, God will lead. Our hope is to equip the church with tools— with hope; thus, the Church will seek and listen to God and respond *with* God.

God hears the cry of the poor and seeks the response of the church.
When we step out in faith, we join God where God is already at work.



Steps for “Going Deeper” in Response to Child Poverty

Congregations are engaged in supporting schools or responding to the needs of children and families at varying levels. C4C offers steps for churches who are initiating or strengthening a partnership with a local school. Through the generous support of The Duke Endowment, C4C developed pilot initiatives that have proven successful in leading congregations to deeper engagement and response to child poverty.

Deeper response comes in a two-fold process. The first is to create small groups which we refer to as Missional Covenant Teams (MCTs). These small groups meet to learn and pray as they seek God’s directive and God’s prophetic voice for contextual, collaborative, transformational response to child poverty.

As this team learns and grows together, responses will surface. Some examples of response in this phase include collaborative summer literacy camps, developing reading buddy programs, after-school programs, and collaboration that responds through Asset Based Community Development.

The teams may be called to take the second step of the process, which is to engage greater community collaboration seeking a collective impact. Examples in this phase include developing collaboration among community organizations that currently engage in response to the needs of children. These include the Health Department, Social Services, other congregations, school districts, local schools, libraries, Partnerships for Children, etc. Leadership from these organizations meet monthly to learn and respond collectively to system challenges.

Phase 1

Step #1- Engage a Missional Covenant Team leader or co-leaders.

Successful Missional Covenant Team (MCT) leaders will have a sense of call to respond to the needs of children impacted by poverty. They value and understand the call of leading contemplative prayer practices, engaging in collaboration, and supporting efforts of empowerment versus relief. They know their community well or hear the call to step out and learn more about the community response to child poverty.

- It is unlikely for one person to be equipped with all of these gifts; it will take discernment and a collaborative spirit to know where to go for help. As the MCT is developed, some of these strengths will be needed to support the leadership of the team.
- It is important to recruit leadership who will approach this work from an “open heart” and through prayer. **Having a leader who has a prayer mindset versus project mindset** (i.e., seeks prayer for guidance in how to build community around an idea versus moving straight into the mode of running a project without building buy-in, trust, letting others own it, etc.) **is a critical part of the success of the Missional Covenant Team.**
- It is important to have leadership who understands collaboration and works with others to determine the mission, vision, goals, and steps versus controlling these aspects themselves.

“[For the leader, you have] got to have someone who gets it – has an empowerment mindset and has the faith foundation and is not afraid of ambiguity. If in relief mindset or project mode without prayer or [if he or she is the] kind of person who takes over things, this would derail process. So, characteristics of the person leading the cohort is really critical. Need to have a spiritual faith outlook and have a heart for what we are doing. Want to make a difference for the right reasons.”

Step #2- Recruit the Missional Covenant Team

The Missional Covenant Team (MCT) is committed to seeking God’s prophetic voice and call to response on behalf of children impacted by poverty, with a desired outcome of response to God’s unique call in your own community. The Missional Covenant Teams are created to develop genuine Christian covenant relationships to fulfill Christ’s command to love God and neighbor while identifying ways they could reduce poverty and/or its negative impacts through empowerment.

- Create a small group committed to seeking their prophetic voice on behalf of children and families impacted by poverty. Where is God calling the church and how is God calling to church to respond to the challenges faced by “the least of these” in your community?

A recent MCT members said,

“What we are seeking to do was not *production oriented* or *just another project* as much as it was about *being spiritually renewed.*”

“It’s not just jumping in to do another project, but really making ourselves available through the movement of the Spirit – changing how we listen and being intentional.”

Step #3- Initiate the Missional Covenant Team

Small groups meet weekly or bi-weekly to engage:

- in learning and practicing contemplative prayer, with a focus on seeking God’s direction and call in response to child poverty
- in understanding the difference between empowerment and relief
- in understanding poverty and its impact on literacy and the brain
- in understanding child poverty in your own community context and current efforts of response
- in understanding the need for both and the difference between collaborative project level response and systems-level response
- in joining current community response or in developing collaborative transformational response where it does not yet exist
- in responding as God leads.

Suggested Resources for small group learning:

- Contemplative Prayer- *Creating a Life with God* by Daniel Wolpert
- The documentary “Resilience: The Child May Not Remember, But the Body Remembers”
- *From Relief to Empowerment* by Lacey and Gaston Warner
- *Empowerment* by Mary Nelson.
- *Toxic Charity* by Robert D Lupton
- *A Praying Life* by Paul E Miller
- Transformational Index is a tool that, helps organizations identify their intended social impact and to measure progress in a way which balances a commitment to values with a focus on results. This half day facilitated workshop enables organizations to adopt language to describe the specific type of impact they hope to achieve, then to develop a visual story of change – the process by which transformation

occurs, and finally, in alignment with these, to begin to put in place creative and suitable ways to measure to what extent this transformative story is being enacted.

Step #4- Contextual Response to Child Poverty

- The team responds contextually and as called by God. At this point responses may be to specific initiatives, projects, or programs.
- The team may hear the call to move into phase 2 to join in broader community collaboration or to create broader community collaboration where it does not exist.

Phase 2

While phase 1 offers response through projects, initiatives, and programs, phase 2 is a long-term approach to collaboration through systems change. The goal is to join an existing broader collaborative or to create one where it does not exist. This collective community collaborative is comprised of organizations that are currently responding to the needs of children. This may include leadership from organizations such as the Health Department, Social Services, other congregations, school districts, local schools, libraries, Partnerships for Children, etc., which could meet monthly to learn and respond collectively to systems challenges on behalf of children impacted by poverty.

Key factors to developing such a community-focused initiative based in prayer, centered around collaboration, and focused on empowerment are as follows:

- Having Missional Covenant Team leaders who share and show the values of using contemplative prayer, engaging in collaboration, and supporting empowerment versus relief and who know their community well
- Having Missional Covenant Team leaders work with church and community members to go through the modules and lead the group in contemplative prayer practices
- Having someone facilitate the development of a mission statement with shared values by engaging the group in a Transformational Index Analysis
- Securing the support of a broader community agency such as Smart Start/The Partnership for Children;
- Allowing the broader group to decide when and how to move forward while continuing to reflect on the values identified through the Transformational Index Analysis and assess how their work does or does not reflect these values.
- Finally, the role of the Conference Connector cannot be understated. This person is critical as he or she is involved in the work from helping develop the Missional Covenant and shepherding and coaching these leaders as communities take ownership of efforts and work to positively impact children and families.