THE GOSPEL FROM
DETROIT

RENEWING THE CHURCH'S URBAN VISION

2014

The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP)

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A)
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THE REV. DR. GRADYE PARSONS
STATED CLERK OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Dear Members and Friends of the Presbyterian Church, especially city-dwellers:

The 221st General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) met in Detroit, Michigan, from June 14 to 21, 2014, graciously hosted by the members of congregations in the Presbytery of Detroit, which serves the region. The Assembly did not ignore the city around it, and in fact sought to affirm the people of that city as they face serious financial and demographic challenges. This report in particular seeks both to hear and to respond to the needs and hopes of that city. Much of it was drafted by a Black pastor and a White professor of ethics, both deeply committed to the church's presence and mission in Detroit.

At the same time, the recommendations that lead in this document (in bold type) are not addressed solely to Detroit. The problems facing that city are not unique but exemplify challenges of tax competition, de-industrialization, national and state level political dysfunction, structural racism, inadequate rules on pension funding, and corruption of elected leaders. For the church it is simply not an option to blame the victim or ignore trends that go back to the rise of suburbs in the 1950's and before. This report is thus offered as a resource for public discussions at city, state, and federal levels, for adult study in our congregations and presbyteries, and for consideration in ethics and religion classes in colleges and seminaries.

I write to persons within and outside our church in my capacity as Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, the highest policy making body of our denomination, to confirm that this policy statement was approved for action by the 221st General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and to clarify its standing. Social witness policies of this kind are part of the larger public witness of our church and are advisory to our members, congregations, and councils. They appeal to the free Christian conscience of members and more broadly to ethical concerns for the common good shared by all citizens. It is a core belief of our Reformed Protestant tradition that Christians have a public responsibility to work with others to help reform the societies in which we live.

In approving the referral of this report to the Presbyterian Mission Agency (including authorization for its dissemination), the General Assembly did not adopt the staff position recommended by the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy. Rather, the Assembly directed the Mission Agency "to convene an urban ministry roundtable with groups and individuals engaged in urban ministry… for the purpose of developing a method of fulfilling the goals of (this) Item… and to report to the 222nd General Assembly (2016)." This language reinforces recommendations 3 and 4 in particular. As is usual in General Assembly reports, the recommendations (in bold type) lead, followed by a supporting study, in this case including an appendix charting the Presbyterian congregations in Detroit—suggesting that other presbyteries do similar surveys.

In forwarding this report to the church, then, it is my hope that each presbytery with one or more cities may convene its own "roundtable" to plan its own mission and to "pray for the welfare of the city in which you are placed."

Yours in Christ's Service,

(The Rev.) Gradye Parsons, Stated Clerk

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NOTE on cover photos: The images on the cover are meant to be suggestive, not representative, and that includes the pictures of church buildings. The photos of building-based artworks that attach objects to houses, trees, and outdoor displays are of parts of the Heidelberg Project, and represent a form of resistance to abandonment and critique of the expectations of cities in our culture. That collection of displays has itself suffered from arson but remains joyful and creative. Readers who search online will be able to find posted many beautiful and challenging pictures of Detroit which, post-bankruptcy-crisis, contains areas of gentrification and redevelopment as well as continued hardship.

THE GOSPEL FROM DETROIT: RENEWING THE CHURCH'S URBAN VISION

[Editorial note: The resolution that follows begins with recommendations that guide the church's mission and public witness. A background study (or rationale) follows that includes two appendices: a survey of Presbyterian congregations in Detroit over time, and a statement by the Michigan Black Presbyterian Caucus (2013). In affirming this action the General Assembly referred its church implementation to a "round table" of concerned persons with experience and expertise in urban mission, trends, and ministry (following recommendations 3 and particularly 4 below). As such, this is a practical and on-going response to the struggles of Detroit, Michigan, the city which hosted the 2014 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

For General Assembly action and resolution text see: https://www.pc-biz.org/PC-Biz.WebApp_deploy/%28S%28hbtc5y0ncrfqf0kj2y2avjty%29%29/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=4803

Although this report received virtually unanimous support in Committee, it was taken out of the Consent agenda (for items receiving more than 75% affirmation) due to its importance. It was lifted up during the Assembly plenary and received overwhelming support signaled by a show of commissioner and advisory delegate hands:

"To refer Item 08-08 to the Presbyterian Mission Agency (PMA) to convene an urban ministry roundtable with groups and individuals engaged in urban ministry including, but not limited to, ACSWP, ACWC, ACREC, and racial ethnic caucuses for the purpose of developing a method of fulfilling the goals of Item 08-08 and to report to the 222nd General Assembly (2016)." The bodies referenced include the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, the Advocacy Committees on Women's and Racial Ethnic Concerns, and the Black, Hispanic, Asian and Arab American caucuses of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).]

RECOMMENDATIONS

Affirming God's call to seek the welfare of the city and to organize God's people for the proclamation of the Gospel and the promotion of racial, economic, and social equity and justice for all citizens of Detroit and other cities of the United States of America, the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) recommends that the 221st General Assembly (2014) take the following actions in both mission strategy and public witness:

1.   Commend the efforts of Presbyterians in city congregations and presbyteries that embody an urban Christian vision; who see the urban poor as clearly as the glittering skyscrapers; who seek to understand urban trends theologically and ethically; and who unite ministries of mercy and justice with evangelism, education, and cultural outreach, recalling our heritage of urban mission leadership and working to renew or build new worshiping communities grounded in a creative Reforming spirit.

2.   To strengthen the church's witness and outreach "on the ground," the General Assembly encourages presbyteries to (a) examine their own histories and statistics of city congregations in the way Detroit Presbytery's are analyzed (see Appendix A to this resolution) and (b) renew their own urban strategies in response to existing racial and economic inequity and to new urban demographic, economic, and transportation dynamics, including the promising movement of more young people into cities.

3.   Strengthen the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s commitment to bear the gospel of Jesus Christ to the cities of this nation and to support mid council efforts by renewing its urban

mission strategy and designating a staff position dedicated to the coordination of General Assembly resources related to metro/urban ministry, including ministries of racial and economic equity; that this position to be lodged in the Presbyterian Mission Agency; that this position be funded through 2020, and that it carry out the following functions:

   a. Work with presbyteries, congregations, and synods to organize local, regional, and national networks of metro/urban ministry practitioners.
   b. Coordinate Presbyterian Mission Agency resources and programs related to metro/urban ministry (that have been located in several ministry areas).
   c. Develop partnerships with other faith-based and community-based organizations, especially those creating multiracial and multiclass constituencies that support metro/urban ministry.
   d. Develop a catalog of resources that are available to support metro/urban congregations and ministries, such as grants, training, and volunteer opportunities.
   e. Provide technical assistance and training to those engaged in metro/urban ministries and to those partnering in the creation of new intentional communities of Presbyterians engaged in such ministries of witness and service.
   f. Work with presbyteries, synods, seminaries, and other related metro/urban ministry organizations to develop training and networking opportunities, particularly with attention to racial and economic justice.
   g. Be an advocate for metro/urban ministry at the congregational, presbytery, synod, and General Assembly level.

4. Equip new ministries and worshiping communities, by directing:

   a. Presbyterian Mission Agency to organize ongoing regional conversations on "Race, Class, and the Current Challenges of Urban Ministry," gathering the rich resources of those who have significant experience in urban ministry, particularly the rich resources of people of color; that the collective wisdom of such conversations be edited, organized, and published periodically in the print, video, and digital media of the PC(USA) for wide availability;
   b. The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, in collaboration with the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns and the Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns (ACREC and ACWC) and the racial and ethnic caucuses of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), to review the social teachings of the church on urban mission, including the challenges of race and class, solicit input from significant leaders in metro/urban ministry, and develop a resource of theological and practical experience-based guidance for all engaged in metro/urban ministry, and that this guide be made available to the 222nd General Assembly (2016).

In Public Witness:

5. Faced with the application of bankruptcy law to Detroit and other cities, to state its concern that democratic governance not be over-ridden by measures more appropriate to corporate receivership; to urge that state laws recognize the mutual dependence of healthy cities and suburbs and rural areas and seek measures to reduce tax competition; to require rigorous cost/benefit analysis of all tax giveaways to distinguish between units of civil government and private/for-profit enterprises; to provide transparent and objective analysis and comparative data on the performance of city and state investment agencies; to otherwise seek to share benefits and burdens across metropolitan areas; and to prevent the dismantling of public assets, infrastructure, and social protections.

6. In view of court decisions and legislation that could allow public employee pension benefit programs to be considered as unsecured creditors (rather than deferred

compensation contracts), to state its concern that such precedents tend to weaken rather than strengthen public trust, to devalue public employees and their collective bargaining rights, and to add to problems of economic inequality and therefore urges federal and state lawmakers to improve statutory protections for all public employee pensions and to improve the oversight, disclosure, and administration of public pension funds.

7.   In view of the need to protect both retirees and taxpayers from poor pension fund administration, to recommend that governments be legally required to make pension contributions every year, that state and municipal employees be included in the Social Security system for efficiency and fairness, that any cuts in current salaries and benefits be distributed with intergenerational equity, and that when public and corporate pension benefits must be adjusted to ensure viability, they not be converted to 401(k)s, which substantially increase market risk for workers.

8.   To support national and state urban policies that favor redevelopment rather than sprawl, efficiency in transportation and energy use, holistic, sustainable, and accountable approaches to "promise zones," and other targeted strategies to assist abandoned or distressed areas.

9.   That the Stated Clerk be requested to post the full text of this resolution and its appendix online, and that a limited number be printed for members and for communication to state, city, and federal lawmakers and regulatory agencies by the Stated Clerk and the Presbyterian Mission Agency.

(see next pages for a short study supporting the recommendations above)

RATIONALE (supporting statement for congregational and other study)

The following pages begin with a brief theological rationale for the above recommendations and the history of hope and crisis in Detroit. They continue with an analysis of how the story of Detroit has played out and continues to play out in cities across the nation. The report concludes with the Gospel from Detroit—a proclamation of the good news of God's presence in the midst of deep personal and institutional suffering.

A. *Introduction*

Habari gani?: a Swahili greeting whereby one encounters another with the question—"What news?" What is the news coming out of Detroit; what is the news being brought to Detroit? As preparations proceeded for the convening of the 221st General Assembly (2014) in Detroit, Michigan, a voice cried out in the wilderness … "Habari gani?"

A compelling story is told of this city in the documentary, "Abound in Hope," inviting the General Assembly to our city. A likewise compelling story is told by the actions of the Michigan Black Presbyterian Caucus, which has identified its constituent congregations as "Urban Churches in Crisis." It has been said that there are three sides to a story: my side, your side, and the truth. In this case, we consider the side of those who abound in hope, the side of those who see themselves in crisis, and the third side. In our quest for the third side, we are called to consider the question of the day—"Habari gani?"

"… Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God" (Rom. 5:1–2, NRSV). The sharing of the glory of God is part and parcel of the Great Ends of the Church: "the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind; the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world" (*Book of Order*, F-1.0304), and the Great Commission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Mt. 28:19–20, NRSV). This sharing is at the heart of the prophetic ministry of the church in Detroit. So for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) gathering in Detroit, does hope abound or is hope in crisis? Habari gani?

B. *The History of Detroit: Hope and Crisis in our Cities*

   1. *A City of Hope*

   Detroit has its own unique history, but the forces that shaped it are forces that have shaped every part of our country. In the beginning of the 20th century, Detroit was the symbol of the promise of America: a place of opportunity where Henry Ford's business practice imagined prosperous workers increasing consumer demand to support profitable industrial growth. Despite mixed motives, Henry Ford was one of the very few industrialists willing to hire black workers and put them into skilled jobs, creating hope and the beginning of a black middle class in the 1920s.[1]

   Like many cities, Detroit grew with the rise of industrialization. Throughout the first half of the 20th century, Detroit boomed with the manufacturing of cars, and then, in World War II, this "Arsenal of Democracy" built tanks, airplanes, armored vehicles, and guns. The promise of manufacturing jobs drew hopeful men, women, and their families to the city, black and white. However, as the timeline below shows,[2] a dramatic reversal began

at the close of World War II. This great reversal was created by government policies, corporate decisions, and individual choices. National trends of urban de-industrialization and suburbanization were carried out in the context of rigid racial segregation, leading to Detroit's loss of white population, increased racial isolation, and plummeting economic resources.

2. *The Birth of Crisis*

Fearing the possibility of another Pearl Harbor, the Federal Government encouraged the decentralization of American manufacturing as a strategy of national defense. It supported a massive expansion of the highway system as part of that strategy. Beginning in the late 1940s, the homes, businesses, and civic institutions of the black urban population in Detroit were devastated by the construction of new highways that carried folk from suburban ring to city center and back again.[3] Automobile companies, along with their interconnected suppliers, were eager to take advantage of government incentives to move out of the city for cheaper land, cheaper workers, and cheaper taxes. The G.I. Bill of Rights and Federal Housing Administration (FHA) policies enabled white families to choose to move to homes in the new suburbs around those relocated factories and businesses.

By 1960, Detroit had lost half its manufacturing jobs—more than 134,000 jobs— including thousands of defense-related jobs that paid middle-income wages. From the late 1940s to the mid-1960s, 500,000 white Detroiters followed those jobs to the suburbs, leaving behind poor whites and virtually all African Americans. Legal residential segregation, FHA red-lining that denied mortgages for properties in black or mixed race neighborhoods as well as to black families moving into white neighborhoods, and restrictive racial covenants barring home sales to Jews and non-whites kept blacks in a city of increasing despair. With the exodus of work, the unemployment rate of Detroit's African American workers in 1960 was a devastating 15.9 percent, about three times that of white workers.[4] Blacks became the first "long-term unemployed," a new term and topic for researchers.

By 1960, there was a new urban landscape in crisis:

> Only fifteen years after World War II, Detroit's landscape was dominated by rotting hulks of factory buildings, closed and abandoned, surrounded by blocks of boarded up stores and restaurants. Older neighborhoods … were now pockmarked with the shells of burned-out and empty buildings, lying among rubbish-strewn vacant lots."[5]

City leaders responded with a variety of urban renewal projects, clearing blighted (black) neighborhoods to build middle-income housing to attract white residents or create large tracts of open land for private development projects. To keep property taxes low for developers, the city adopted an income tax in 1962. The tax continued to rise as the city struggled to pay for basic services. More residents fled. [6] Racial segregation, legal or illegal but customary, combined with a shrinking housing market in an increasingly segregated city, and inadequate access to financial resources continued to deny black residents the option of flight.

3. *A City in Crisis*

Detroit now wears a devastating triple crown: the poorest big city in the U.S., the nation's murder capital, and its most racially segregated metropolitan area; a city that in 2013 *Forbes* named "America's Most Miserable City."[7] It is also the home of 700,000 souls where 50.4 percent of the children live in poverty and the official unemployment rate is 17.7 percent.[8] It is a city where 31.1 percent of all families live below the official federal poverty line, including almost half of both white and black families with children under eighteen.[9] Can we hear the cry of the people? Detroit infants die at twice the infant mortality rate of the state of Michigan. Adults suffer asthma at a rate 50 percent higher than the rate for all Michigan adults. The asthma rate of Detroit's children is two times as high as that of Michigan. As a result, the death rate in Detroit due to asthma is twice that of Michigan.[10] Detroit's zip code 48217 is the most polluted in the state, but the residents (white, black, and Latino) are too poor to move—who would buy?[11] The majority of Detroit's public schools do not meet federal adequacy standards; and in 2009, the overall death rate for Detroit children one to fourteen years of age was 116 per 100,000 children, compared with the state average of 18 per 100,000.[12] Yet, when misery abounds, God hears the cry of the people—and comes to deliver. So we welcome you to Detroit knowing that God is here and believing that this is where God summons the PC(USA) to be: sharing hope and hearing anew the good news of God's grace. Habari gani?

[See "Detroit Population Chart" under Additional Resources.]

C. *Racial and Economic Inequity in Urban America*

1. *Cities in Crisis*

Detroit is not alone in this struggle. Deindustrialization and suburbanization, combined with residential racial segregation, continue to shape urban America.[13] Of the twenty largest cities in 1950, more than half have lost at least one-third of their population, including Baltimore, St. Louis, Pittsburgh, and Cleveland.[14] Our cities bear a greater burden of poverty. 20.9 percent of city populations are poor compared to 11.4 percent of suburban populations.[15] Each of the ten poorest big cities in America (more than 250,000) has a poverty rate above 25 percent (Detroit, Buffalo, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Miami, St. Louis, Newark, Philadelphia, Memphis, and Milwaukee). Seven of these cities are also among the ten largest U.S. cities with the greatest racial segregation. Because poor Hispanics and poor whites tend to be more suburbanized than poor blacks, it is in urban centers that poor African Americans are highly concentrated, racially segregated, and economically isolated, facing unprecedented levels of joblessness. In his book, *When Work Disappears*, sociologist William Julius Wilson called this "the new urban poor."[16]

However, while cities continue to bear the greater burden of poverty, in the last decade inner-suburban poverty has increased at a greater rate than urban poverty. The Great Recession caused poverty rates to rise in 79 of the 100 largest metropolitan areas and incomes to fall in 91 of them.[17] Almost twenty years ago, urban pastor Bob Brashear warned that cities were the canary in the coal mine.[18] What he saw happening in cities then, he argued, was a precursor for what Christian ministries everywhere would face in the future. The suburbanization of poverty in the "edge cities" of metro areas is now occurring in areas as diverse as Atlanta and Phoenix.[19] The issue of racial segregation continues amid the nation's growing cultural diversity. In 2012, despite increased suburbanization of black and Latino families, 80 percent of Latino students and 74 percent of black students attend "minority-majority" schools reflecting the re-segregation

of education in the U.S.[20] As the gap between rich and poor grows, so does educational inequality, inadequate public transit, housing insecurity, food insecurity, poor health, addictions, crime, and the inability of local governments inside and outside city limits to respond to growing human needs as revenue sources shrink.

Everywhere America's cities struggle to provide basic services and honor the pensions of city employees. Everywhere American workers struggle to achieve economic security for their families. Cities and their families struggle in the context of a country that has chosen to respond to economic challenges with a great tolerance for economic inequality. The U.S. is the most unequal country in income and wealth distribution among the advanced countries of the world.[21] Of these modern countries, the U.S. has the highest poverty rate and the highest child poverty rate.[22] The percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) that goes to social expenditures, including Social Security and Medicare, is one of the lowest among modern nations.[23] Everywhere, despite significant advances following the Civil Rights Movement, people of color suffer these conditions disproportionately, affected by the many forms racism continues to take.

2. *Hope for the Future*

Yet, the Detroit metropolitan area is not impoverished. In 2005, prior to the great recession, Metro Detroit's gross domestic product (GDP) placed it as the 22nd richest metropolitan area in the world, just above Madrid.[24] In terms of GDP per capita, it placed 35th among the top 100 world metropolitan regions. Oakland County, just on the other side of 8 Mile Road, is consistently ranked as one of the wealthiest counties in the country. In 2009, Oakland County was the fourth wealthiest county in the United States among counties with more than one million people.[25]

And, like many other cities, Detroit is beginning to experience a process of focused re-gentrification in midtown and downtown, along the Woodward corridor where a Whole Foods just opened up to accommodate young, well-educated adults seeking city lights and denser, walkable city life. The Millennial Generation of 80 million people is about to change the housing and transportation patterns created by older generations. Those born between 1980 and the early 2000s are returning to the urban core, to public transportation and affordable apartments, and to diverse cultures. The real estate industry, city planners, and transportation authorities are all predicting and preparing for what some call "the next migration"—back to cities. The Millennials want to be more connected and less isolated than previous generations. They manifest this desire in their full-on embrace of social media and their desire to live in places where they can be around others; i.e., the densest, most active, areas of cities."[26]

In fact, 80 percent of the U.S. population now lives in urban areas. According to new Census Bureau data, in 51 percent of the nation's largest cities, city centers grew faster than the suburbs in 2010–2011.[27] Six cities have seen their core populations grow more in total numbers than their surrounding suburbs: New Orleans, Louisiana; New York, New York; San Jose, California; Providence, Rhode Island; Columbus, Ohio; and San Antonio, Texas. "Most of the fastest-growing big cities since 2007 are of the sprawling post-1945 Sun Belt variety, including Charlotte, North Carolina (No. 4); Ft. Worth, Texas (No. 6); Austin, Texas, (10th); El Paso, Texas (11th); Raleigh, North Carolina (12th); and Oklahoma City, Oklahoma (18th)."[28] And, according to the global business consulting company, McKinsey & Company, fully 85 percent of the U.S. GDP in 2010 was generated in 259 large U.S. cities. The 21st century, they argue, will be a century of

global cities in which the large and middleweight cities of the U.S. will be a major force.[29]

Will the PC(USA) be there to proclaim the gospel for the salvation of humankind; to shelter, nurture, and provide spiritual fellowship for the children of God; to maintain divine worship; to preserve the truth; to promote social righteousness; and to exhibit the Kingdom of Heaven to the world? Habari gani?

D. *The Church in the City*

1. *Churches of Hope*

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, the predecessors of the PC(USA) carried out urban ministry shaped by the example of Calvin's holistic ministry in Geneva: a ministry for the salvation of individuals integrated with a ministry to redeem social structures and create a just community that enabled the growth of human capabilities and Christian values. In the 19th and 20th centuries, urban Presbyterian churches in the U.S. were built to provide services to the poor such as education, job training, and shelter. They were active in developing housing projects and medical facilities. In the 1940s and 1950s, the training of many Presbyterian pastors included time spent working in factories and living in working-class neighborhoods in order to understand the forces affecting urban families' lives. However, in the 1950s and 1960s, as white populations moved out of the cities, a national focus to create new suburban congregations grew.[30] Over six decades white Presbyterians, like other white Christians, left city neighborhoods for life in the new suburbs, taking their churches with them. The result, intended or not, was to gradually withdraw the church's ministry from urban black and Latino neighborhoods, as well as from the urban neighborhoods of low-income white families, as the impact of growing economic and racial isolation deepened.

2. *Churches in Crisis*

As in many other cities, and like other mainline white denominations, the dwindling presence of the Presbyterian church in Detroit since 1960 has mirrored the loss of the white city population (See Appendix A). In 1960, when the population of Detroit was about 1,600,000 and 70 percent white, forty-five Presbyterian churches served the city. Thirty-seven had at least one full-time pastor.[31] In 1990, the population of Detroit had fallen to 1,027,000, 22 percent white and 76 percent black. Twenty Presbyterian churches, sixteen with at least one full-time pastor, served the city. Responding to this trend in 1992, the Presbytery of Detroit brought an overture to the General Assembly urging that proceeds gained by the sale of urban churches remain in the city: 80 percent locally and 20 percent to be used at the national level for urban ministries projects around the country.[32] By 2013, the population of Detroit had fallen to 700,000: 10 percent white, 83 percent black, and 7 percent Hispanic. The Presbytery of Detroit lists twelve churches within the city. However, only four have full-time pastors. Five are "vacant" and three others have part-time leadership through a stated supply, temporary supply, or commissioned ruling elder. Of these eight, only two report a membership over 100. We have gone from supporting one church for every 35,500 city residents to one church (most not fully functioning) for every 58,350 city residents. Since only four of these can support a full-time pastor, we have essentially abandoned this city: one full-time pastor for every 175,000 city residents.

The Michigan Black Presbyterian Caucus Statement (MBPC), "Churches in Crisis," (Appendix B), reports that only two of nine MBPC member urban churches have full-time called teaching elders and the remaining seven cannot afford to call a full-time pastor or even enter into a contractual relationship with a stated supply. They ask, "How can these churches grow and become healthy without strong consistent spiritual leadership?" And they answer: "MBPC member churches without full-time called teaching elders require full-time called competent Presbyterian spiritual leadership who are called and able to minister in an urban context. … Without leadership how are the people to discern what God is calling them to be and do?"[33] If we believe that worshipping communities can only have the pastoral leadership they can afford, have we not turned the gospel of Jesus Christ into a commodity only for those with the money to buy? How can we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God?

3. *Hope Remains*

Yet, where our urban ministries remained, those involved in ministry on the streets of the cities, our urban pastors and worshipping communities, continued to work and develop strategies to respond to the deepening urban crisis: substandard housing and irresponsible landlords, racial profiling and police violence, deteriorating schools, job loss and job discrimination, red-lining, poverty-level wages, and non-responsive city departments, utilities, and private businesses. Urban ministry strategies were twofold: (1) providing immediate assistance to individuals in need, and (2) community organizing to enable communities of low-income residents to unify, defining their issues, developing their leaders, and taking action to hold city and corporate entities accountable to addressing their needs at a structural level. [34]

In 1981, the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. and the Presbyterian Church in the United States adopted "A Joint Urban Policy." This policy recognized that in the biblical witness, "the city" is frequently a metaphor for human arrogance, a place of prideful struggle for self-interested power. For some Christian Americans, the city is still a place of frightening heterodoxy and blatant immorality where every type of belief and desire is pursued without restraint: a place of violence in many forms. However, "A Joint Urban Policy" also pointed out that sin and violence are not the Bible's only or final urban vision. In the biblical witness, the city is also a vision of hope and a place of redemption. In the Psalms, Zion is a symbol of the just and peaceful city, the city of God (Psalm 48). The redeemed city, the New Jerusalem, is that place where God dwells, establishing justice and wiping every tear away (Rev. 21: 3–4, RSV). "A Joint Urban Policy" challenged the church to understand that as the U.S. and the world become increasingly urban, the church's response to the city and the souls within it will be a test of its faithfulness to Christ.

> Christ's agenda compels us to work for the deliverance of those presently held captive by the 'principalities and powers' of this world, to 'bind up the brokenhearted,' to 'raise up the former devastations,' to 'give garlands instead of ashes' (Isaiah 61:1–4). We believe that God's agenda compels us to work on behalf of a just community wherein the needs of the poor, the alienated, and the dispossessed are the first priority:
>
> 'God has shown strength with God's arm, and has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, God has put down the mighty from their thrones, and

exalted those of low degree; God has filled the hungry with good things, and has sent the rich empty away.' (Lk. 1:51–52, RSV Inclusive) [35]

The 207th General Assembly (1995) approved the report of the Urban Strategy Taskforce, "Urban Strategy to the Year 2005." In recognition of declining membership at a time when the U.S was becoming increasingly urban and ethnically diverse, the church adopted an urban ministry model based on the conviction that any effective metro-urban strategy must be (1) person-centered and interpersonal, (2) congregationally enacted and interacted, (3) community partnered, (4) nurtured and connected through governing bodies, (5) seminary equipped, and (6) envisioned and experienced in worship. The new emphasis was on the need for urban ministries to grow locally from a process of listening, action, reflection, and revision; that to address the structural causes of issues, alliances would be built among congregations organizing across denominational and religious lines and between congregations and nonprofit organizations. Seminaries were called to prepare students for ministries in the urban context, with the skills and knowledge that would require.

And it recognized that such local, partnered, congregational initiatives must be supported with local presbytery or regional leadership. A national staff for urban ministry would be needed, not to develop programs, but to coordinate resources already existing, develop networks and information sharing systems, provide training opportunities, pilot projects, volunteer opportunities, and collaboration with ecumenical partners.

> Urban ministry in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) during the twenty-first century will call us to know and love our neighbor. It will realize that it takes a community infused by the Spirit not only to know and raise a child or an adult, but to raze and raise structures. It will recognize that the city and those who inhabit it are the dwelling place of God. [36]

As if in response, in 1999, just on the cusp of the new century, the Reverend Dr. Nile Harper documented the powerful impact of twenty-eight urban churches in twelve different cities where "a positive movement beyond individual acts of Christian charity toward more organized, collaborative action for justice" was remaking urban neighborhoods. He identified an embryonic energy of renewal:

> From within the churches, and especially within African-American churches, there has emerged a passionate vision and push for redevelopment of city neighborhoods that is deeply rooted in religious faith and practical wisdom. … Faithful vision and spiritual power are at the center of the movement. [37]

Fifteen years later the desperate crisis and the potential promise of our cities are even more clear. The need to proclaim the gospel, to shelter and nurture the spiritual fellowship of the children of God, and to maintain divine worship in the city could not be more compelling. Our responsibility to preserve the truth, promote social righteousness, and exhibit the Kingdom of Heaven as cities become the energetic core of the 21st century could not be more demanding. The research has been done, the policies are in place, and we hear God's call to heal and to rebuild.

"The Gospel from Detroit" calls upon the church to embrace the prophetic mandate of Jer. 29:7 (NRSV)—"But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." Jesus had the

welfare of a city at heart when He gave instructions to His disciples—"And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Lk. 24:49, NRSV). The church in Jerusalem, as found in Acts (Chapters 2–4), was a church that truly abounded in hope. Sadly, many churches in Detroit do not abound in hope. Instead of seeking the welfare of the city, many of these churches are forced to seek out their own welfare as they operate from a perspective of crisis, not power. Habari gani?

4. *Money, Power, and Politics*

From theories of community organizing, we learn a fundamental principle of how people become empowered: organized people + organized money = power. A church established upon such a principle is a church that can truly live out the prophetic mandate of Jeremiah. The church in Jerusalem was a church with organized people: "Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common" (Acts 4:32, NRSV). The church in Jerusalem was a church of organized money: "There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need" (Acts 4:34–35, NRSV).

The constituent churches of the Michigan Black Presbyterian Caucus are in crisis largely because they lack people and money. They also lack called pastors to live and pray among them. It is because of these factors that churches in crisis lack power; lack hope. A church in crisis in a city in crisis; a church that lacks power in a city that, under the decision of the Michigan governor and the actions of an emergency manager, has had the power of its elected officials neutered.

In 2011, the citizens of Michigan voted to repeal a 1990 law authorizing "emergency financial managers." A month later the state legislature passed and the governor signed into law Public Act 436, which allows the governor to appoint such managers when a city or school district is in deep financial distress. Detroit is not alone in being in financial distress, nor is it alone in having an unelected emergency financial manager running the city.[38] A recent survey by the University of Michigan found 30 percent of the cities across Michigan reporting an increasingly harder time meeting their financial obligations. Six other Michigan cities, and 49 percent of the state's black population, are under the control of an unelected emergency financial manager with the authority "to dismiss elected officials, abrogate labor contracts, sell off public assets, and impose new taxes on residents." [39]

On January 1, 2014, a newly elected mayor took office after six weeks of negotiating "a power-sharing agreement" with the emergency manager who was appointed by the governor of Michigan in the spring of 2013. Under this agreement, the mayor will have no authority over the police force or any of the city's financial obligations. The mayor will have no standing as the emergency financial manager negotiates to repay two global bank creditors (who are customers of the same law firm the manager is using to represent the city of Detroit and with whom he worked until becoming an EFM) between 75 and 82 percent of their debt, while targeting the pensions of city employees (averaging $19,000 annually) and the art collection of the Detroit Institute of Art as sources of revenue. The emergency manager determined that the bank debts were "secured" but that the pensions of city employees were not. Under such laws and legal practices democracy is crippled,

the will of the people is thwarted, and the welfare of the city becomes even more shattered.

The case of Detroit has raised considerable discussion of municipal and state pension fund management, prompting several recommendations.[40] Like many state and municipal governments and private companies, some contributions to pension funds were deferred and the true size of liabilities not fully understood.[41] Combined with the after-effects of de-industrialization noted above, the city of Detroit had little room to maneuver and little help from either state or federal sources.[42]

In the absence of significant amounts of new public infrastructure investment (as in China), the U.S. government is also going forward with "promise zones" and other initiatives involving public and private partnerships. These are distinguished from "enterprise zones" by greater accountability for tax rebates and other expenditures and greater attention to community involvement in planning and design, intending greater community benefit.[43] These are worth testing, but seem unlikely to stimulate big declines in the number of unemployed and discouraged workers who would benefit from public infrastructure investments.

E.   *The Gospel from Detroit*

So here we have it. The story of Detroit. Every story has three sides. One side abounds in hope; one side in crisis. And then there's the truth. Habari gani? Does the faith of the PC(USA) justify hope in the city of Detroit, or does it justify crisis? As the 221st General Assembly (2014) gathers in the city of Detroit, it does so in a quest for the truth of Rom. 5:1–5 (NRSV)—"Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us . …" As the 221st General Assembly gathers in the city of Detroit under the banner Abound In Hope, the question demands an answer—Habari gani?

The news from Detroit is a gospel that comes from those who know not only personal suffering, but also the social suffering that comes from the experience of living in a society that has failed to share access to the resources that support human dignity and equal opportunity. From the experience of unjust suffering grows a tradition of Christian faith that knows deep down, in its bones, in every family's history, that no one could have survived this history and no one survives these conditions except for the grace of God. In the context of personal and social suffering where only the power of God stands between us and the principalities of this world that can kill in a blink of an eye or ever so slowly over generations of deprivation, this grace is experienced daily. Out of the experience of unjust suffering, a faith grows that knows its utter dependence on God alone. And with that understanding devotes its life to serving God with love, hope, courage, and strength that is foolishness to the wise and the satisfied and the keepers of accounts.

So, today in communities struggling with the breakdown of schools, the absence of jobs, inadequate city services, higher fees and predatory loans, the constant presence of poverty, and excessive rates of illness and death, the Gospel from Detroit assures and affirms that in this suffering God is here with us, Immanuel. In the face of social indifference, or even human hatred, God calls us "child," hears our cries, loves us so much, and calls us to share this Gospel with the audacity of faith that creates ways where there are no ways, lives in hope when they say there is no way, no hope.

The Gospel from Detroit is good and joyous news: it announces faith in God, not governments or corporations or any human institutions, who calls us out of the world in order to reshape us to radically reengage this world with the startling message of a just God who denounces the bondage of social, political, economic, and racial injustice (Lk. 4:18, Lk. 6:20f, Mt. 25:31f, Mic. 6:6f, Ex. 3:7f, and others). Standing in this grace we have received through Jesus our Christ, our faith becomes active and powerful as it does justice, loves mercy, and walks humbly with God (Mic. 6:8).

> Lift ev'ry voice and sing, till earth and heaven ring
> Ring with the harmonies of Liberty
> Let our rejoicing rise, high as the list'ning skies
> Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
> Sing a song full of faith that the dark past has taught us
> Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us
> Facing the rising sun of our new day begun
> Let us march till victory is won.[44]

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(NOTE: TWO APPENDICES FOLLOW)

APPENDIX A: PRESBYTERIAN PRESENCE IN DETROIT: 1960, 1990, 2014

Detroit: Church/ Address	**1960** 44 churches and Highland Park: 36 with FT Pastors plus HP	**1989/1990** 19 churches and Highland Park: 16 with FT Pastors	**2013** Current description 11 churches and Highland Park: 4 with FT Pastors
Bethany 12227 Findlay	1 Pastor		
Broadstreet 12065 Broadstreet	1928–1959 dissolved 1961–	1 Pastor 1989 no mortgage	Leadership: Vacant Size: 79 Racial Composition: 79 African American
Cadillac Blvd. 5090 Cadillac Blvd	1 Pastor		
Calvary 8240 Grand River, now 19125 Greenview	2 Pastors	1 Pastor	Leadership: Full-time Pastor Size: 200 Racial Composition: 163 Black, 20 African, 12 Native American, 5 White
Calvin East 6125 Cadieux	1 Pastor Full-time	1 Pastor	Leadership: PT CRE Size: 105 Racial Composition: 54 African, 51 White
Calvin West 14221 Southfield	3 Pastors Full-time	1 Pastor	
Central Northwest 16776 Southfield	1 Pastor		
Church of the Master 16601 Tireman	1 Pastor		
Covenant 740 E. Grand Blvd	2 Pastors		
Delray Community House 800 Contrell			
Dodge Community House 6201 Farr Ave.			
East Detroit, Covenant 19300 Stephens Dr.	1 Pastor	No Pastor	
Eastminster 937 Manistique	1 Pastor		
Evergreen Village 20021 W. Chicago	1 Pastor		
First Presbyterian 2930 Woodward	2 Pastors Full-time	Stated Supply Interim	Clustered with Westminster
Fort Street 631 W. Fort Street	1 Pastor	1 Pastor; 1 Christian Educator 600 members	Leadership: Full-time Pastor Size:240 Racial Composition: 2 Asian, 71 Black, 5 Hispanic, 162 White

Detroit: Church/ Address	**1960** 44 churches and Highland Park: 36 with FT Pastors plus HP	**1989/1990** 19 churches and Highland Park: 16 with FT Pastors	**2013** Current description 11 churches and Highland Park: 4 with FT Pastors
Fox Creek NCD 897 Philip		X 1987 18 members	
Grace 15340 Meyers in 1960 18391 Morang	2 Pastors	1984 merger of Bethany and St. James created Grace PC with 1 Pastor; Stated Supply in 1990	
Grandale 15727 Plymouth	1 Pastor	1981 merger: Grandale and Church of the Master; 1990 Stated Supply	
Gratiot Avenue 8549 Gratiot	1 Pastor	Temporary Supply	Leadership: Vacant Size: 50 Racial Composition: 49 Black, 1 White
Hope 15340 Meyers		1971 merger of Grace and St. Marks created Hope PC; 1990 1 Pastor and one Christian Educator	Leadership: PT Stated Supply Size: 89 Racial Composition:: 88 Black, 1 White
Immanuel 340 W. Grand Blvd	1 Pastor		
Jefferson Ave 8625 Jefferson Ave.	4 Pastors	1 Pastor and 1 Christian Educator	Leadership: 3 Pastors Size: 505 Racial Composition: 12 Asians, 85 African Americans, 8 Africans, 400 White
Knox 3952 Dickerson	1 Pastor		
Leith Memorial 601 S. Colonial	No Pastor		
Military Avenue 1002 N. Military	No Pastor		
Monteith Memorial 19125 Greenview	1 Pastor 750 members in 1950's	1 Pastor 200 members	
Olivet 707 Lawrence	1 Pastor		
Outer Drive 4849 Outer Drive	1 Pastor		
Palmer Park 642 W. McNichols	1 Pastor		
Redeemer 2784 W. Grand Blvd	1 Pastor		
Redford 17226 Redford 22122 W. MxNichols	4 Pastors 3,500 members in 1960's	1 Pastor	
Riverside 4455 Second Ave.			Org. 2011; ended ???
St. Andrew's 12735 12th St.	1 Pastor		

Detroit: Church/ Address	**1960** 44 churches and Highland Park: 36 with FT Pastors plus HP	**1989/1990** 19 churches and Highland Park: 16 with FT Pastors	**2013** Current description 11 churches and Highland Park: 4 with FT Pastors
St. James 18391 Morang	1 Pastor		
St. John's 1410 Jos. Campau 1961 E. Lafayette	1 Pastor 1919 first African-American PC in Detroit	Interim Pastor	Leadership: Vacant Size: 155 Racial Composition: 152 Black, 3 Native American
St. Marks 9321 12 St	1 Pastor		
Scovel Memorial 5740 Williams	1 Pastor		
Southwest United 7354 Whittaker		1970 merger of Immanuel, Olivet, and Trinity 1 Pastor	
Trinity 7354 Whittaker	No Pastor		
Trinity 4849 W. Outer Drive	No Pastor	1979 merger of Outer Drive and St. Andrew's creates Trinity; nearly 300 members; Interim Pastor	Leadership: PT Temporary Supply Size: 95 Racial Composition: 95 White
Trumbull Avenue 1435 Brainard & Trumbull	2 Pastors	No Pastor	Leadership: Vacant Size: 37 Racial Composition: 37 African American
Village United 25350 W. Six Mile	1 Pastor		
Ward Memorial 12850 Plymouth	3 Pastors		
Wayne University Campus	1 Pastor		
Welch 2504 Monterey	2 Pastors		
Westminster 17567 Hubbell	5 Pastors 2,000+ members in 1950's	2 Pastors	Leadership: FT Pastor Size: 302 Racial Composition: 207 African American, 15 African, 80 White
Woodward Ave 20 W. Philadelphia 8501 Woodward	2 Pastors	1 Pastor	
Highland Park United: 14 Cortland	2 Pastors	No pastor 82 members	Leadership: Vacant Size: 46 Racial Composition: 4 Black, 42 African American

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APPENDIX B: "URBAN CHURCHES IN CRISIS"

Statement by the Michigan Black Presbyterian Caucus (2013)

The need and importance of strong spiritual leadership in predominantly African American urban Presbyterian churches.

Statement of Need:

MBPC member churches without full-time called teaching elders require full-time, competent Presbyterian spiritual leaders who are called and able to minister in an urban context. Churches without full-time called teaching elders are not able to afford to call full-time teaching elders.

Statement of Importance:

MBPC member churches can no longer afford to let the urgent needs of the congregation drive out or overshadow the important needs.

Demands on the session and other church members to repair infrastructure, maintain the worship space, monitor giving consumes most of the available time. Therefore little time is available for ministry, and long term planning, also important to the life of a healthy church, rarely gets the attention it needs.

What is important? Having full-time, dedicated, called, and competent spiritual leadership serving our churches. Without leadership, how are the people to discern what God is calling them to be and do? Without competent leadership how are sessions able to discern what is required of them? Without competent leadership, how is the session held accountable?

The urgent matters of maintaining the infrastructure now take priority over the spiritual well-being of the congregation.

With all the challenges facing urban churches it becomes even more difficult to face them without strong spiritual leadership.

Supporting Data:

Only two (2) of nine (9) MBPC member urban churches have full time called teaching elders.

The other seven (7) cannot afford a full-time minister, and in many cases churches cannot afford a contracted stated/pulpit supply teaching elder. How can these churches grow and become healthy without strong consistent spiritual leadership?

Concerns:

• Lack of consistent session leadership.

• Who teaches the faith?

• Who leads the saints for the work of ministry?

• Who preaches and teaches the faith of the church over time and within context?

• Who provides training and teaching of members, deacons and ruling elders?

• Who provides for the teaching of scriptures through Bible study, Sunday school, etc.?

• Lack of leadership in spiritual discernment, "what is God calling us to do as a church?"

• Lack of a facilitator or leader to lead the church through times of disagreement.

• Lack of a leader to help reconcile brothers and sisters to Christ and each other.

• Urban churches are under siege by high cost of maintaining older infrastructures and declining membership.

Appendix B (continued)

Considerations:

Churches without full time called teaching elders have a difficult time discerning the spirit of ministry. What ministry is God calling us to do? Where is this ministry? Why this ministry? Churches without full-time called teaching elders know how to pay their bills, maintain the infrastructure but lack a sense of ministry and belonging.

How is the relationship with the presbytery nurtured without a member of presbytery to provide this connection? Churches without full-time called teaching elders are not afforded as many opportunities to work collaboratively with the presbytery as those who have full-time called teaching elders.

These churches are often given a list of stated and pulpit supply pastors to preach and moderate sessions. This cannot be the model of Christ's Church. After a period of time the churches become accustomed to this method and develop a false sense of "we are OK" when in reality they continue to lose their sense of community and relationship with the presbytery and other worshipping communities.

When we make it easy to obtain a preacher to lead worship by paying $125/service, what incentive do these congregations have to minimize this scenario when they look at their budget and see the money they can save?

But what about the quality of relationships and spiritual health of the congregations? Who assesses the spiritual health? What stated or pulpit supply teaching elder or ruling elder has spent enough time with the congregation to preach contextually to the congregation? What good is a sermon if it does not speak to the people? How can a stated or pulpit supply pastor speak to the context of the congregation when they do not live day to day or week to week with the congregation?

Pope Francis recently said he wanted church leaders to "smell like sheep." How can temporary stated supply or pulpit supply or half-time call teaching elders "smell like sheep" if they don't live and pray among them? How can half-time, part-time, pulpit supply teaching elders "feed my sheep?"

Without full-time called spiritual leaders to nurture and feed the flock how can congregations expect to grow and do ministry?
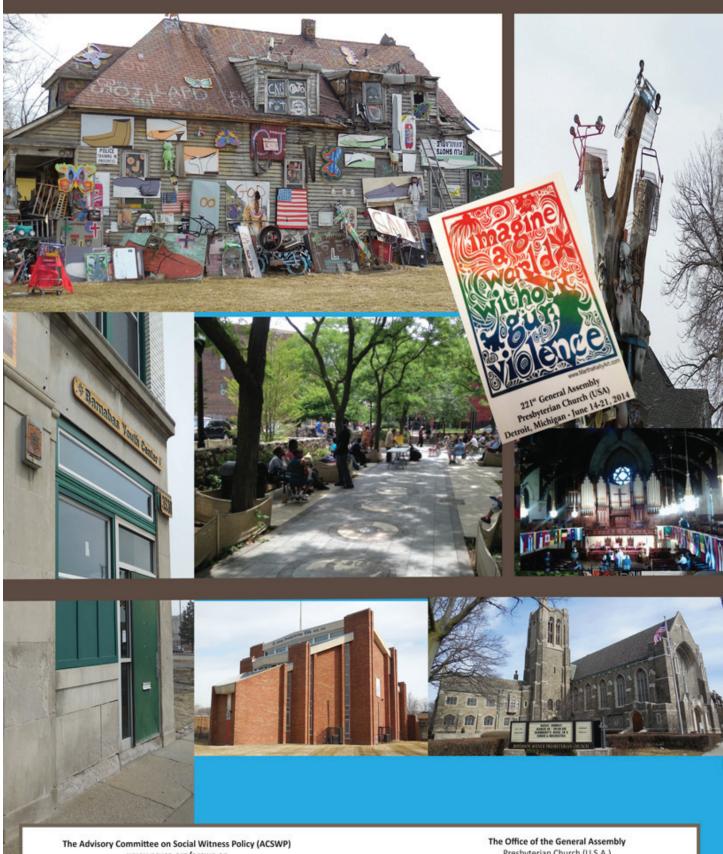
Churches that can only afford to call half time teaching elders only experience marginal improvement. Many half-time teaching elders either must have current employment or have multiple jobs to sustain a decent quality of life. If not managed appropriately churches expect full-time attention at half-time pay. This is not sustainable over the long term.

Request:

A new model of church leadership is needed to meet the changing needs of urban congregations. Funding is needed to help churches call a full-time or dedicated less than full-time teaching elder.

The Ranney-Balch fund of the Presbytery of Detroit is one source of support. Many of the urban African American churches in the Presbytery of Detroit not only cannot afford full-time spiritual leadership they cannot afford to sustain musicians and other staff needed to support a healthy church. The Ranney-Balch Fund of more than a million dollars is one current and available source of support. The Ranney-Balch Fund was willed to the Presbytery of Detroit by Ms. Elizabeth Ranney-Balch for work among Italian, Negro, and aged poor of the congregations.

This problem must not be overlooked and treated with anything other than a sense of importance. We cannot afford to "let urgent drive out what is important." At stake is a faithful walk with Christ.

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