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COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

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How to Reach Across Racial and Economic Barriers

Communities are strengthened by trust. But how do you create trust where there has been only silence and suspicion?
Some leaders are finding a way.

Mayor David Berger of Lima, Ohio, has faced the problem no community leader wants: what to do about a city deeply divided by race. In 1992 African Americans, angry about the Rodney King verdict in Los Angeles and other grievances, marched through Lima's downtown. For days, the city of 45,000 was on edge.

Lima weathered the week with the help of black leaders, but Berger knew nothing was resolved. So he started searching for ways to heal his city's divisions and build cooperation across racial and economic barriers.

Within months Lima began what has become one of the nation's most extensive programs for discussing racial differences. And more than talk has come of it. Black and white groups are working together, from holding social events to co-sponsoring recreation centers. Says Berger's assistant, Ron Hagaman, who's in charge of the program, "It has brought a whole lot of people together who would never have gotten together."

The American Dilemma

Lima's leaders learned a valuable and surprisingly rare lesson. They didn't cause America's deep-seated racial divisions, but they have much to gain in resolving them. The reason: If local leaders don't deal with racial, ethnic and economic tensions, many of the other things they want to do will be impossible.

Albany, Ga., learned that lesson a five years ago when the chamber of commerce was raising money for an economic development campaign. Chamber officials were

shocked when the word came back from the city's biggest industries: They wouldn't contribute unless the city did something to improve race relations. The chamber began a series of programs to bring black and white leaders together.

Kansas City, Mo., found the same thing when its leaders were drafting a strategic plan for the city. If they didn't address the growing gap between the races, they realized, the planning process would fail — and maybe the city itself.

And so it goes from New York to Los Angeles, Fort Wayne to Fort Lauderdale. Important programs, from combating crime to bolstering neighborhoods, turning around schools to creating new industry, are stymied by racial mistrust.

Building Trust

1. Start with personal education and a small discussion group.
2. Learn the process of building trust, which involves talk and action.
3. Look for opportunities to involve the city's leadership.
4. Sell the benefits of racial and economic trust to leaders — and market your successes to the public.
5. Take the process to the grassroots.

Why? Because, as Martha McCoy, director of the Study Circles Resource Center, explains, "race is the underlying structure" of many community problems. Until community leaders deal with the underlying problem, it's hard to solve the ones on the surface.

Why Leaders Fear Racial Issues

But it's also the problem most civic leaders dread. Here's why:

- Many fear it's so great a problem it's unsolvable. "How do you get your arms around it?" asked one observer.
- Some are discouraged when they find people of different ethnic and economic backgrounds look at the same situation in vastly different ways. As a result, consensus can be difficult.
- Others fear the vulnerability of taking on racial issues. Whites are afraid of being attacked as racists, on the one hand, or radicals, on the other. Minorities fear rejection by whites and the scorn of other ethnic leaders.
- Some worry about the anger it unleashes — with good reason. There are so few opportunities to talk about racial fears and frustrations, when they are discussed, it sometimes ends in a shouting match. "I call it the law of accumulated grievances," says the Rev. Thomas Savage, who's active in civic work in Kansas City.

The Payoff of Trust

So why bother?

Two reasons: First, the rarity of interracial trust is what makes it valuable. A city that knows how to bring together groups across racial, ethnic and economic lines will find almost any other problem easier to solve. And it can be a major factor in economic development as companies steer away from places with social tensions. As Shirley Strong of the Levi Strauss Foundation explains, "It's at the heart of a community's success and growth."

Second, the benefits grow in times of trouble. "When there's a crisis," Strong says, "these places are better able

to handle things" because leaders know whom to call, how to communicate and whom to trust.

And there's a personal benefit for you. Leaders who know how to create and nurture interracial coalitions have special value in their communities — and learn a rare set of skills. In troubled times, these leaders move to center stage.

Two Paths

If you want to make this your role — the one who brings together racial and ethnic groups — begin with this insight: There are two paths for building coalitions.

The first starts with a problem that cuts across racial and economic lines, such as education reform or crime, and tries to build an interracial coalition to deal with it. This is what experts call the "task-oriented" approach.

The other is "relationship-oriented." It holds that the best way to build interracial coalitions is to talk first about racial experiences and attitudes, then identify problems that diverse groups can tackle.

The vast majority of civic leaders prefer the first approach because it appears more manageable. It promises a reward — a community problem solved — without the risk of taking on the underlying issues of racial and ethnic division. But that's also why it works so rarely.

Take Memphis, Tenn.'s attempts at education reform. In 1991, business and civic leaders announced an ambitious program for bolstering the city's schools, which are majority black. Sensitive to appearances, they recruited some African Americans to serve on the steering committee. But the program never took hold.

Why? Because black leaders saw it as an effort to embarrass the superintendent, an African American who was running for mayor. Moreover, it didn't address the deeper divisions in the community. Black leaders never accepted the goals, neither did the black community, and gradually the program lost its appeal for the business community.

This happens so frequently that some observers call race an "iceberg issue." In trying to avoid the parts you see, you end up being sunk by the parts you don't.

The second approach, which deals directly with race, is harder initially, far less commonly used but has a greater likelihood of success. The Lima and Albany programs are good examples of "relationship-oriented" programs. They start with frank and often painful discussions of race, followed by projects that allow whites, blacks and other minorities to work as equals.

A Third Way?

There is a third approach that blends task-oriented and relationship-oriented elements. It begins with a project of great importance to the community, and uses it to deal forthrightly with racial and economic differences. The strategic planning effort in Kansas City, which the Rev. Savage co-chaired, is an example.

From the start, Savage says, Focus Kansas City addressed racial and economic problems as part of its work. His group met with African American and Latino leaders as separate "perspective groups" and held public hearings

in minority neighborhoods. Recognizing the black and Hispanic communities' unique perspectives was an important step, he says, in "legitimizing these communities" and underscoring their importance to the city.

Listening respectfully to minorities' concerns — from leaders and the community — eased many suspicions. And when the comments from the minority communities were compared with those of other perspective groups, Savage adds, "we found that their concerns had much more in common with the others than anyone thought they might."

The Nub of the Problem

The point is, what seems to many whites to be a round-about approach is often the surest. In some cities, ethnic groups have stored up years of frustration. Until you listen to their grievances thoroughly and respectfully, they will not be interested in cooperating with your projects.

Why Should I Trust You?

There comes a moment in every chess game, players say, when a single move wins or loses the game.

You'll face one of those moments in your effort to build interracial coalitions in your community. It will come when you approach your city's top leaders about forming a multiethnic leadership group.

If this move goes well, your chances of success are greatly heightened. If it goes poorly, they're greatly reduced. Without the leadership's blessing, it is very difficult to bring together people at the grassroots level.

Know this: The odds are against you. That's not a judgment on your city's leaders as much as a recognition of human nature. People do not make difficult changes unless the alternatives are clearly worse.

Still, you have a chance. How great a chance depends, experts say, on several factors:

- The crisis. No one wishes for trouble, but the more serious the crisis, the more open leaders will be to a new approach. The crisis need not

The city is facing another racial incident, and you have a solution. But first you must do some convincing.

involve social unrest, however. When Albany's top industries signaled their unhappiness, it jolted the city's leadership and created a demand for solutions.

- Your credibility. If you're known as a fair and responsible person — and if you have a reputation for listening to others without being defensive and protective — other leaders will be more likely to endorse your efforts. If you have a reputation for irresponsibility or hotheadedness, they won't.

- Who vouches for you. You won't be known in some parts of the community as well as in others. Here's

where the members of your small group are critical. They must be willing to vouch for you with their leaders.

- Which leaders endorse you. There's safety in numbers. If the key decision maker is the mayor, ask other leaders to endorse your plan first, then present their endorsements to the mayor. It will give him or her the confidence to accept it.

- How convincing is your plan. Keep it simple and don't promise a quick fix, but point out how similar efforts have worked elsewhere.

- How well you sell the benefits. Every leader you visit will have different concerns. Listen first, and present the benefits that answer those concerns.

- What you can offer in return. Don't underestimate how difficult it will be for these leaders to agree to your plan. So keep the discussion focused on the benefits to the city in general and the leader in particular. One thing you can offer every leader is public praise.

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Editor: Otis White

Mailing address: P.O. Box 1687, Decatur, GA 30031-1687

Telephone: (404) 371-9534

Fax: (404) 373-3804

E-mail: 71053.2400@compuserve.com

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Myrtle Parnell, a consultant in New York who deals with diversity issues, says this is at the heart of America's racial misunderstandings. "In white, middle-class culture, people are very task-oriented," she says. "Relationships evolve over the course of doing the tasks. In many other cultures, you start first with the relationship, then you move on to doing the tasks."

Parnell's partner, Jo VanderKloot, agrees that serious discussion — and respectful listening — must precede action for interracial coalitions to succeed. "If you don't do that," she says, "I can guarantee you it won't work."

Difficult, Not Impossible

By now, you're beginning to see why racial and ethnic cooperation is so rare: It requires patience, courage and a new set of skills by civic leaders. But it can be done. Here are some ideas from experts:

- Start at the top. Creating communitywide trust is hard work, and it needs support — and participation — from your city's leaders. Sell them on the need for an interracial leadership group. As McCoy points out, "It's hard to imagine the public will find ways to come together if the leaders don't."
- Take it to the grassroots. Don't stop with the leadership; real progress is made by building trust at the grassroots level. But when you go to the public, begin with the most sympathetic groups you can find. City officials in Lima launched their biracial discussion groups in churches. In your city, too, there are groups that are open to cooperating across racial lines.
- Balance talk with action. Start with talk, but don't neglect the need for joint projects or you'll lose the interest of those who are task-oriented. "It can't be one or the other," says Shirley Strong. "It has to be both."
- Keep the dialogue constructive. Anger and fear are almost inevitable in any honest talk about race. But endless anger will wreck a discussion. So in planning any forum or discussion, think of ways to moderate the emotions you're sure to arouse. In Lima, the city trained black and white facilitators to work in teams. "That has been the key for us," Hagaman says.
- Be patient. Jones Hooks, who's president of the Albany Area Chamber of Commerce, compares building racial trust to economic development: It takes time. "When you get into this," Hooks says, "don't think you're going to have two or three meetings and solve all your problems."
- Don't despair. Parnell and VanderKloot warn clients that interracial relationships are always difficult because each group sees issues and events differently. Especially in the early meetings, it may appear that discussions are

at a standstill. Don't give up; these disagreements are part of the process. What's often needed, they say, is a facilitator who can help participants find the "underlying roadblocks" and expand the areas of agreement.

- Be open to personal change. Maybe more than anything else you'll do as a community leader, dealing with race will cause you to search your soul. Don't be surprised to find yourself changed, but don't be afraid of the changes either.

Think small: Your first discussion group will give you the credentials for a larger role.

First Steps

Your first step as a coalition-builder should be personal education. Go to the public library and find books about race and ethnic identity.

If you're white, you may want to start with Cornel West's *Race Matters*, then read other books about African American experiences and attitudes. If you want to learn more about Mexican Americans, begin with Richard Rodriguez's memoirs, *Hunger for Memory* and *Days of Obligation*. If you're black, you may want to read Stanley B. Greenberg's *Middle Class Dreams* to understand the racial feelings of suburban whites.

You'll need this education because sooner or later your own attitudes will be questioned. Your views should be informed, sympathetic and settled. And, of course, consistent. Don't try to tell African Americans or Hispanics one thing, and whites another.

The next step is to look for partners, people who share your interest in interracial bridge-building. You don't need a crowd: Four or five will do — as long as they represent the city's major ethnic and economic groups.

Don't look for top leaders. At this point, you have nothing to offer people at the top — black, white or Latino. Rather, search for people who have a genuine interest in improving race relations and are neither too compromising nor too confrontational.

It's important to begin with a small, sympathetic group because you'll be learning the difficult art of racial and ethnic coalition-building and you're bound to make mistakes. Better to make them here, with friends, than in the midst of a crisis with the entire city watching.

The process itself is simple: honest talk followed by joint action. The talk — if it's met with respectful listening — will lay the groundwork for trust. And the work your group takes on, from cleaning up a city park to helping out a Habitat for Humanity project, will build it.

You'll need this group for another reason. It will give you credibility, a kind of resume in race relations. (See "Why Should I Trust You?" page 3.) As you move into larger civic roles, you'll need someone to vouch for your experience and fairness. The group should provide you with those credentials.

Looking for Opportunities

As you're working with the small group, start looking for ways to move to a larger audience. It won't be easy. For a host of reasons, most civic leaders want to avoid dealing with racial and ethnic problems — and they won't be eager to participate in an effort whose purpose is to build new and uncertain coalitions.

There are two ways of gaining leaders' participation. One is to use a major civic project, like Kansas City's strategic plan, to address racial problems. Unfortunately, such opportunities come along rarely and there's a natural objection: Why inject racial concerns into this project?

Another approach is to wait for an incident, a moment when the leadership's attention is riveted on racial divisions, and offer the city's leaders a way out of the crisis — and other crises to come. That's what happened in Lima. It took a week of unrest to create enough civic will to tackle problems that were decades in the making.

What can you offer as a solution? That's for you to determine. Your small group will give you some idea of what works best — and what can be sold in your city.

But, at the minimum, your proposal should include these elements:

- It should center around an effort to bringing together diverse groups.
- It should involve a balance between talk and action.
- It should start at the top, with community leaders from every racial and ethnic group, then move to the grassroots level.
- It should be endorsed — and supported — by your community's top leadership.

Forming a Leadership Group

The tragedy of many cities is that it's easier for leaders to fight than cooperate. If that's the case in your city, you'll have to create enough rewards — long-term and short-term — to keep leaders involved in your program.

That's crucial because if leaders, from the majority or minority communities, lose faith in your efforts, you'll never get a chance to try it at the grassroots level. They'll find ways to undermine the program.

What Makes for Healthy Dialogue

One of the main reasons people don't talk about racial differences, experts say, is they don't know how. Either they think it's impolite, or they fear the emotions that might emerge.

But there's no way to build trust among ethnic groups without talking honestly about differences. The Study Circles Resource Center has helped communities establish discussion groups about race and other social issues. Here are a few of SCRC's recommendations:

- Set some ground rules and make sure everyone accepts them. Two important ones: Don't interrupt and don't attack people personally.
- Encourage participants to talk about their own experiences and own cultures, not about others.
- Understand that people communicate in different ways. Some are more assertive and outspoken than others, but each has something valid

How do you talk constructively about race? By following some common-sense rules.

to say. As leader, you may have to encourage those who are reserved.

- Be scrupulously fair. Discussion leaders shouldn't express their own views, but they do set the tone for the group. Two keys: Listen intently to participants, and don't let the most vocal members dominate.
- Don't let the group make you the expert. Your job as leader is to pose questions, not answer them. When someone asks your opinion, turn the question over to the group to decide.

One way to get people thinking is to ask "open-ended" questions. That is, questions that can't be answered by yes or no, but require explanation.

- Don't worry about coming to a consensus. The role of constructive dialogue is to increase understanding, not make decisions.
- In the end, summarize what has been discussed, and ask participants how they've felt about it.

Michael Rogers, a college professor in Albany, Ga., who has worked with interracial groups, poses this question to participants: "Do I intend to be open, listen, empathize and learn about others and myself? Or do I intend to be closed, judge others and protect myself and my group?"

Adds Rogers, "We go forward only when our intention of working together is genuinely based on seeking to understand others."

There are three parts to this problem. First, you have to get the right people in your leadership group — aim for the most respected leaders you can attract from all parts of the city. Second, you must involve them so deeply that they're reluctant to walk away. And finally you have to bolster their commitment by demonstrating to the public that your group is making progress.

In theory, this isn't so different from any other coalition-building effort, the kind you might assemble to promote an economic development program or push for a bond referendum. But in practice, it's far more difficult for three reasons:

- The atmosphere in your meetings will be intense, especially at first. This will be the white leaders' worst nightmare: They'll be under personal attack. Unless they've been sold on the long-term benefits of your program — and prepared for the anger they'll face — they won't come back. Parnell and VanderKloot emphasize that it's critical that whites not "shut down and tune out" during these early meetings. "If whites shut down," they say, "blacks may feel that whites are disinterested rather than worried or frightened." That may only escalate emotions.
- Black and Hispanic leaders may find themselves under attack too, for "selling out" by working with white leadership. This is why it's important to pick the most respected leaders — the ones with the credibility to

cooperate — and find ways of showing their constituents that progress is being made.

- It involves a leap of faith, and leaders hate to commit themselves to uncertain outcomes. After all, if you're successful, you'll be knitting together new groups in your city, with black, white and Latino organizations working together. Why should existing leaders who made it to the top in a polarized city agree to these new, potentially threatening combinations?

The answer is good salesmanship. You must find and sell the benefits that appeal most to these leaders. For one leader, it might be a way of reaching new groups of supporters. For another, it may be a way of softening a confrontational image. For a third, it may be the chance for broader recognition. The point is, each leader must be sold individually on the benefits of cooperation. And you can, of course, remind leaders of the grim alternatives: endless racial and ethnic strife — and a community that doesn't work for anyone.

One thing you should promise each is public praise. Be unstinting in interviews with the news media about these leaders' courage — and deliver that message to their constituents as frequently as possible.

Finally, let nothing be a surprise. Tell each member what to expect in the group meetings: long, painful discussions about racial differences, followed by action.

A Flood of Anger

How painful? It depends on the community — and how well white, black and Hispanic leaders know and trust each other. But have your committee members prepared for an outpouring of frustration and anger. (See "What Makes for Healthy Dialogue," page 5.)

The first meetings of One Albany, the interracial leadership group formed in Albany, Ga., were wrenching. Michael Rogers, a college professor who helped organize and plan the sessions, recalls one African American leader objecting to the word "trust." "He said, 'There are people in this room I don't like, let alone trust,'" Rogers recalls. Another wondered aloud if the meeting were a trap — an effort to get black leaders in one place so they could be assassinated.

But the anger and suspicion subsided after the first few meetings, Rogers adds. "What you have is 200 years of perceived inequity on the part of black people, and it comes pouring out," he says. "And in a way it's a test of whites. Can you sit there, hear and acknowledge my anger, and come back again, wanting to understand?"

So far, they have, in large part because the chamber of commerce did a good job of convincing white leaders that Albany's future was on the line. "They have that goal," says Rogers, "that interracial unity is so important to the ultimate success of the entire community."

Why Action Is Important

Talk alone, though, isn't enough. You have to balance it with action — concrete, jointly managed projects. That's important because:

- Action builds trust. Talk will create understanding, but it still takes work and accomplishment to create trust. But be careful how these projects are structured; the best are shared projects, in which everyone has an equal voice — and equal responsibility.
- It takes the heat off leaders. This is especially important for ethnic leaders, who may be under attack for attending the meetings. The sooner you can show results, the easier it will be for them to deal with critics.
- You want to show leaders that the process works. As they're learning to trust one another, you want to them trust you — and your process for bringing diverse groups together.

What kinds of action? Look for short-term and long-term projects. One Albany has done both, working with local agencies and businesses to resolve some complaints immediately and creating task forces to work on longer-term problems.

Moving to the Grassroots

As important as it is to bring leaders together, your goal should be to move to the grassroots level. This is

Your Source List

Here are some of the information sources used in this issue of COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP Quarterly:

Ron Hagaman
Administrative Assistant
Mayor's Office
City Hall
50 Town Square
Lima, OH 45801
(419) 221-5282

Martha McCoy
Director
Study Circles Resource Center
PO Box 203
Pomfret, CT 06258
(860) 928-2616

Myrtle Parnell
Jo VanderKloot
Partners
Parnell & VanderKloot
9 West Lake Rd.
Warwick, NY 10990
(914) 986-3560

Michael Rogers
Chair
Coalition for Diversity
Albany State College
Albany, GA 31705
(912) 432-6531

The Rev. Thomas Savage, S.J.
President
Rockhurst College
1100 Rockhurst Rd.
Kansas City, MO 64110
(816) 501-4250

Kerry Tucker
President
Nuffer, Smith, Tucker Inc.
3170 4th Ave.
San Diego, CA 92103
(619) 296-0605

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By Kerry Tucker and Sharon Long Mc Nerney
Public Relations Journal, January 1992

Other Ways To Build Trust

The most effective way to deal with racial differences and build civic trust is to do so directly, by bringing together the city's leadership, then moving to grassroots groups.

But are there other ways, half-steps between doing nothing and making a wholesale commitment to change? Actually, experts say, there are several:

- Form a group to discuss racial issues. A discussion group will greatly increase your understanding of the minority communities in your city. And it will give you a valuable network of contacts.
- Look for minority perspectives, not just minorities. There's a subtle but

important difference between seeking African Americans or Latinos for civic boards — and actively seeking an African American or Latino perspective. As a leader, you build civic trust by encouraging boards to search for the strongest, most credible leaders from minority communities — and asking them to speak honestly.

- Learn about your city's ethnic groups. This could be a project for your discussion group: study the demographics and history of African Americans and Latinos in your community. As part of the study, invite in ethnic leaders to talk about themselves. Knowing these leaders could be a great advantage later on.

As Martha McCoy of the Study Circles Resource Center points out, many cities turn to African American and Hispanic leaders only in times of

trouble — or to tackle a major civic problem, like education reform or crime. "And that often seems suspicious," McCoy says. "Their question is, 'Why are you inviting us now?'" Solution: Get minority leaders involved before there's a crisis.

- Find ways to socialize. No one is surprised to learn the strongest relationships are formed not at work or across conference tables, but at social gatherings. In Lima, black and white churches host picnics together as a way of strengthening their bonds. Civic groups in your community could sponsor similar events across racial lines.

Keep two rules in mind, though. Plan the events jointly and look for roughly equal turnouts. And alternate the sites, so whites get a chance to learn about ethnic neighborhoods.

where interracial trust is most lacking, and where communities can make the greatest progress in dealing with the underlying problems of race.

But you were right to start at the top. Leaders are naturally suspicious of new ideas and untested approaches. You have to show them first that your process has benefits for the community — and for them personally.

By now, you know how to bring groups together, but there are several things you should keep in mind before moving to the grassroots:

- Use the same talk-then-action process you used with leaders.
- Keep the groups small. McCoy says more than 15 people is too large a group for discussion; 12 is the optimal size. "If 100 people show up, you need to split them into 10 groups," she says.
- Start with success. Find groups that want to cooperate across racial and ethnic lines, such as churches, community leadership organizations, YWCAs and Junior Leagues. Their success will give others confidence in your approach.
- Market the successes. In a world filled with interracial strife, this is real news: groups working together across racial, ethnic and economic barriers. Make sure the news media know about it — and are on hand to witness the projects. Why is marketing important? Because it increases civic trust, even among those who only see these projects on television or read about them in the newspaper. And it's another reward for your leadership group, something the members can show constituents as proof that their efforts — and yours — are working.
- Get others involved. Up to now, you've probably done most of the work yourself, with help from your small group. As you move to the grassroots level, it's time to teach others the talk-and-action process — and, in doing so, enlarge the leadership pool.

Two ideas: First, train facilitators, as Lima and Albany have done. Lima uses teams of black and white volunteers to guide the discussion, moderate tensions and spare community leaders from doing all the work.

Second, look for materials on guided discussions. A good place to begin is with the Study Circles Resource Center in Pomfret, Conn., which has helped cities set up interracial discussion groups. The Levi Strauss Foundation in San Francisco also has materials that can help grassroots efforts. Ask for its Project Change materials.

Are You the One?

The value of better race and ethnic relations for communities is unquestioned. Maybe the best proof is to look at cities that have suffered repeated racial disturbances. Almost uniformly, these are places in economic or social decline.

But should you take on America's greatest problem?

The answer lies with you — and your community. Do you have the openness to change, the patience and the strength of character to deal with the emotions you're sure to arouse? Do you have the support from friends and family?

Would the top leaders in your community value a better racial climate? How much would it improve your city? How have other race-relations efforts fared?

If the answers are mostly favorable, then building coalitions across racial and economic lines may be a good leadership role for you.

And it need not always be painful. In Lima, where numerous groups have been formed to talk about race, the experience has been so positive, Ron Hagaman says, groups are often disappointed when they finish. "The word that keeps coming back is, we want to do more," Hagaman says.

And that's just what American cities need to do about improving race relations. More. □

Star Tribune Editorial

Our perspective

Community circles

Support talks on housing, education

In many cultures, most notably Native American, the circle is an important symbol. It can stand for beginning and ending; it can represent the cycle of birth, life and death. Or it can simply be the way people organize themselves to discuss issues, solve problems or protect one another.

That symbolism is at the heart of a local effort to get folks thinking and talking about education, race and housing. A coalition of more than 20 Twin Cities partners, the Community Circle Collaborative, is wisely promoting a metrowide series of small group discussions on this question: How does racial and economic segregation of housing affect educational achievement and life opportunities?

The idea is to get at least 200 people (five to 15 at a time) actively involved in study circles. Ideally, each group will be as diverse as possible across racial, ethnic, economic, age and political lines. They will be urban and suburban, work from a common discussion/information guide and will meet several times for two to three hours. Sessions will take place early next year.

Among the organizing partner groups are the Minneapolis Initiative Against Racism, the Minnesota Minority Education Partnership, the Minneapolis, Edina and St. Louis Park public schools, the Institute on Race & Poverty and the Minnesota Fair Housing Center.

Do the organizers have an agenda? You bet. They start from the basic belief that racism and segregation hurt everyone. They know that many students who perform poorly in school

come from deep pockets of segregated, low-income housing. And they rightly agree these housing, family and economic questions must be addressed to help improve educational outcomes.

The Collaborative has a direction, but it doesn't have all the answers. And so, the small circles are designed to get civil, informed dialogue and analysis bubbling up from citizens. The questions and solutions will then be used to guide policies and practices of government, school boards, nonprofits, foundations, businesses and grass-roots groups. Community circles have been used successfully in other cities around the country to help form public policy and build public awareness and consensus.

All metro-area residents are huge stakeholders in this issue. Parents and singles alike pay for public schools, police, courts and prisons. Both the young and the old want safe neighborhoods and good housing. Whether you are black or white, rich or poor, well-educated children eventually help fuel a stronger economy and higher quality of life for everyone.

With help from the Bush and Bremer foundations, the Collaborative will provide recorders and train facilitators for each circle. For more details, attend the kick-off/information session on Tuesday, 9-11:30 a.m., at the St. Louis Park City Council Chambers, 5005 Minnetonka Blvd. Or call Dick Little, at the Education & Housing Equity Project, 871-8980.

Join the circle of those who want better housing and education opportunities in the Twin Cities.

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EDUCATION & HOUSING EQUITY PROJECT

Mission Statement

The purpose of the Education & Housing Equity Project (EHEP) is to act as a catalyst to build broad-based coalitions and engage the community in public discussions and advocacy for the purpose of promoting racially and economically inclusive communities that give families of all incomes, races and ethnicities access to schools and housing throughout the metropolitan area.

Good?

Current Activities:

- (1) Exploring how to build a coalition that can work for racially and economically inclusive communities and respond to the segregation and disparities now developing in the housing and schools of the Twin Cities metro area.
- (2) Working in collaboration with other housing, education, religious, and anti-racism organizations to plan and implement a metro-wide study circle and community forum project for 1997 that focuses on the questions: "How does racial and economic segregation of housing affect educational achievement and life opportunities of Twin Cities' children?" and, "What can citizens do individually and collectively to enhance the educational and life opportunities for all children in the Twin Cities metropolitan area?"

Contact Information:

122 West Franklin Ave, #320
Minneapolis MN 55404
tel: 871-8980
fax: 871-8984
e-mail: micah@mtn.org

Staff:
Dick Little, Coordinator

122 WEST FRANKLIN AVENUE, #320 * MINNEAPOLIS, MN * 55404
PHONE: 612-871-8980 * FAX: 612-871-8984 * EMAIL: MICAH@MTN.ORG

THE COMMUNITY CIRCLE COLLABORATIVE

SUMMARY

The Community Circle Collaborative is a metro-wide dialogue project being undertaken by a growing number of organizations and individuals throughout the Twin Cities area for early 1997. We envision a program in which at least 200 people from all walks of life join together - 5-15 at a time - in "community circles" held throughout the metro area to discuss the question: "How does racial and economic segregation of housing affect educational achievement and life opportunities?"

The partners that make up the Collaborative are coming together with a shared belief in the need for civil, informed dialogue and collective analysis - across all racial, economic, and political lines - about the trends and changes taking place in the communities and schools of the Twin Cities metro area today. It is our hope that bringing together such groups will both build understanding and produce practical recommendations for actions that organizations, policy makers, and individuals can take. Our inspiration comes from successful, large-scale programs already launched in a number of communities around the country.

Project Goals

1. To discuss how the community in which we live and our personal experiences as members of that community affect children's education.
2. To educate participants about other communities' perspectives and experiences.
3. To examine the challenges that housing segregation pose for our educational system.
4. To develop and implement strategies to overcome these challenges.

Community Circle Structure

Community circles are small, highly participatory discussion groups that engage people in controversial, political, thought-provoking topics. The community circles model combines the small-group discussion groups known as "study circles" with a model developed by the Minnesota Minority Education Partnership, which stresses providing information and research services to the groups, the cooperative development of strategies by the groups, and subsequent community forums organized by the groups.

A typical community circle will include 5-15 members. Each community circle will be as economically, ethnically, racially, and politically diverse as possible. Each group will meet for approximately 10 hours and be led by a trained facilitator. A common *Discussion Guide* that includes readings, presentations of a range of viewpoints, and discussion questions will be used by all the groups. Beyond these base materials, however, each group is encouraged to set the framework for subsequent circle discussion and request research on specific topics. The community circle approach provides a framework for dialogue that allows participants to address an issue, examine different views on both the problem and possible remedies, and pursue concerns and solutions that interest and motivate them toward action.

Levels of Organizational Involvement

Critical to the success of the project is the effective mobilization of the different organizations that make up the collaborative. To facilitate involvement, the collaborative has identified a specific process and structure. The structure identifies the roles and responsibilities of the project's partners as follows:

Project Coordinators will manage the project by providing the necessary staff support, fundraising, conducting research, and implementing the project evaluation. Organizations that agree to be Project Coordinators will sign a *Pledge of Participation* outlining their roles and responsibilities in the project.

Resource Partners will play an advisory role regarding project design, fundraising, future projects, information/research, in-kind contributions, and/or technical assistance. Resource partners will sign a *Pledge of Participation* outlining their roles and responsibilities.

Sponsors will sponsor community circles by recruiting community members, facilitating community circles, and providing a location for community circle meetings, child-care, and transportation. Sponsors will sign a *Pledge of Participation* outlining their roles and responsibilities in the project.

Timeline

The project intends to kick off in December, 1996 with a forum for potential sponsors. Facilitators will be trained in January 1997. The community circles themselves will begin shortly thereafter. A final conference for all participants -- where community circles share their ideas and solutions -- will take place in Spring, 1997.

Discussion Guide

5/28/96 draft table

Materials for each session

	Primary session question	Background information	Views to explore	Reading excerpts	Discussion questions	Additional readings
Session 1	<i>How does the community in which we live and our personal experiences as members of that community affect the education of our children?</i>	Introduction to study circle process	Sharing of personal experiences			
Session 2	<i>What does residential segregation mean in the Twin Cities metropolitan area today?</i>	Current metro housing patterns - by race & by income	Different perspectives on the causes of residential segregation			
Session 3	<i>What is the state of educational opportunity and achievement in the Twin Cities today?</i>	Current metro education patterns: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Racial & socioeconomic makeup across different school districts -- Achievement statistics across different school districts -- Resources available across different school districts 	Various perspectives on these differences			
Session 4	<i>How is the composition of our communities affecting these differences in educational opportunity and achievement?</i>	Effects of residential segregation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Effects of concentrated poverty on schools -- Need for busing/desegregation -- Differences in tax resources -- Lack of interaction across races and classes 	Different perspectives on this connection and the effects			
Session 5	<i>What can we do in our communities? What larger policies are needed?</i>	Summary of group's discussion thus far	Different approaches and policies proposed		Group development of strategies	

Discussion Guide

Tentative Outline

Table of Contents

Foreword -- Why talk about how residential segregation effects education?

Discussion Materials

Introduction -- New challenges facing our metropolitan-area communities and schools

Session 1 - *How does the community in which we live and our personal experiences as members of that community affect the education of our children?*

- Introduction to the study circle process
- Sharing of personal experiences

Session 2 - *What does residential segregation mean in the Twin Cities metropolitan area today?*

- Current metro housing patterns - by race & by income
- Presentation and exploration of different perspectives on the causes and impacts of residential segregation

Session 3 - *What is the state of educational opportunity and achievement in the Twin Cities today?*

- Current metro education patterns
 - Racial & socioeconomic makeup across different school districts
 - Achievement statistics across different school districts
 - Resources available across different school districts
- Presentation and exploration of various perspectives on these differences

Session 4 - *How is the composition of our communities affecting these differences in educational opportunity and achievement?*

- Effects of residential segregation
 - Effects of concentrated poverty on schools
 - Need for busing/desegregation
 - Differences in tax resources
 - Lack of interaction across races and classes
- Presentation and exploration of different perspectives on this connection and effects

Session 5 - *What can we do?*

- Presentation and exploration of different approaches and perspectives on what should be done
- Group development of strategies

THE COMMUNITY CIRCLE COLLABORATIVE

PLEDGE OF PARTICIPATION FOR: SPONSORS

Responsibilities of the Working Group:

1. Form partnerships with public officials, organizations, and individuals working to address housing, education, employment, and racism issues, and seek their support.
2. Recruit a broad group of Resource Partners and Sponsors to carry out the program.
3. Promote and publicize the project through the media and through Sponsor organizations.
4. Work with Resource Partners to prepare a *Discussion Guide* for the community circles and provide research support to the community circles.
5. Work with Sponsors as they recruit participants, identify meeting sites, and arrange for the details of individual community circles. When necessary, pair homogenous groups of participants to create diverse study circles.
6. Work with Resource Partners and Sponsors to organize Community Forums I and II.
7. Coordinate fundraising for the project.
8. Train community circle facilitators.
9. Draw on feedback from the community circles to prepare a report for the community.
10. Evaluate the community circles and other components of the project.

Responsibilities of Sponsors:

1. Become a well-informed spokesperson for the program by participating in a pilot study circle, or at least by reading through the Discussion Guide.
2. Establish one or more study circles in collaboration with the Working Group and facilitator(s).
3. Recruit between 8 and 15 people for each community circle.
4. Arrange a site for each community circle and a meeting time convenient for participants and facilitators.
5. Distribute discussion materials prior to each community circle's first session.
6. Recommend possible facilitators and recorders.
7. Promote the program by any means possible, including bulletins, newsletters, and personal contacts.
8. Participate in presentation of results of each community circle at Community Forum II.
9. Where possible, provide in-kind contributions such as child care, meeting space, and transportation (see below).

Name of sponsoring organization or agency that you represent:	
Your name:	
Your address:	
Your telephone & fax:	
Your e-mail (if applicable):	

I understand the responsibilities of Sponsors and commit my organization to this project. This commitment is based on approval from our Board of Directors, Executive Director, or other appropriate authority.

In addition, my organization can provide the following if necessary:

Child care Refreshments Transportation (specify: _____)
 Meeting space Facilitator training Translator(s) Recorder(s)
 Media equipment Volunteers for Community Forums Other: _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Return to:
 Dick Little
 Education & Housing Equity Project, c/o MICAH
 122 W Franklin Ave #320
 Minneapolis MN 55404
 tel: (612) 871-8980 fax: (612) 871-8984



SCRC asks you to take part in

Beyond Busing

**the first community-wide study circle program in
the Twin Cities area**

Study circles in the Twin Cities

The study circle process has been used for small-group deliberation in many Twin Cities projects over the last ten years. Programs like "Minnesota's Talking," the Minneapolis Quality Schools Study, and the Minnesota Study Circle Network were among the first in the nation to use the study circle format as a way of involving citizens in addressing public issues.

"Beyond Busing" and the Community Circle Collaborative

The Community Circle Collaborative (CCC), a multi-sector coalition of over 20 Twin Cities organizations, is poised to take Minnesota's study circle tradition one step further. Over the last year, the CCC has been planning and organizing a community-wide study circle program on the challenges of segregation in the metropolitan area. The CCC is now enlisting individuals and organizations to serve as sponsors, facilitators, or participants in "Beyond Busing: A Metrowide Dialogue on the Challenges of Education and Housing Segregation." See the attached newsletter for information on how you can get involved.

What is a community circle?

Many study circle organizers actually use different names for their small-group process than "study circle" – citizen circle, dialogue circle, and reader roundtable are some examples. The CCC is using the term community circle. Whatever the name, the process is the same:

- A community circle is comprised of 10-15 people who meet regularly over a period of weeks or months to address a critical public issue in a democratic and collaborative way.
- A community circle is facilitated by a person who is there not to act as an expert on the issue, but to serve the group by keeping the discussion focused, helping the group consider a variety of views, and asking difficult questions.
- A community circle examines many perspectives. The way in which study circle facilitators are trained and discussion materials are written helps the group explore areas of common ground.
- A community circle progresses from a session on personal experience ("how does the issue affect me?") to sessions providing a broader perspective ("what are others saying about the issue?") to a session on action ("what can we do about the issue here?").

What is a community-wide study circle program?

The "Beyond Busing" project reflects what SCRC has learned from study circle organizers around the country. Study circles can take place within organizations, such as schools, unions, or government agencies. They have their greatest reach and impact, however, when organizations across a community work together to create large-scale programs. These community-wide programs engage large numbers of citizens in a community – in some cases thousands – in study

circles on a public issue such as race relations, crime and violence, or education. Broad sponsoring coalitions result in strong, diverse community participation. People participate in the study circles because they see that it provides an opportunity to make an impact on an issue they care about.

How do community-wide study circle programs come into being?

Typically, a single organization such as a mayor's office, a school board, or a human relations commission spearheads and staffs the project. In most communities, the organizing begins when the initiating organization approaches other key organizations to build a sponsoring coalition. Most community-wide programs have 10-30 organizations as sponsors or endorsers. Grassroots organizations such as churches, neighborhood associations, businesses, schools, and clubs often take part.

What are the outcomes of community-wide study circle programs?

By participating in study circles, citizens gain "ownership" of the issues, discover a connection between personal experiences and public policies, and gain a deeper understanding of their own and others' perspectives and concerns. They discover common ground and a greater desire and ability to work collaboratively to solve local problems – as individuals, as members of small groups, and as members of large organizations in the community. Community-wide study circle programs foster new connections among community members that lead to new levels of community action. They also create new connections between citizens and government, both at an institutional level and at the level of parents and teachers, community members and social service providers, residents and police officers.

Where are community-wide study circle programs going on?

In 1992, Lima, Ohio, became the first city to create a community-wide study circle program. Since then, 26 communities have followed Lima's lead, ranging in size from Orford, New Hampshire, to Los Angeles, California. Over 100 other communities are in various stages of planning and organizing community-wide programs; the actual study circle phase of most of these programs will begin within the next year. SCRC also collaborates with a number of national organizations that are working with the community-wide study circle model, including the National Crime Prevention Council, the YWCA of the USA, the League of Women Voters, the Education Commission of the States, the National Association of Human Rights Workers, the National Council of Churches, and the Alliance for National Renewal.

"Beyond Busing"
Metro-wide Dialogue on Housing, Schools and Desegregation
Scheduled for Winter 1996-97

by Dick Little, Co-Chair, MIAR Education Task Force

Can Minneapolis break the social path followed by so many other major cities over the past two decades? What can we and our metropolitan neighbors do to work toward city- and metro-wide solutions to the race and poverty issues overwhelming the city schools and moving into the suburbs?

These are some of the questions driving an MIAR-initiated collaborative of 20 civic and community-based organizations and public agencies to organize a metro-wide dialogue project for the Winter of 1996-97. The collaborative will bring at least 200 citizens from all walks of life to join together, 5 to 15 at a time, in "community circles" to discuss the question: How does racial and economic segregation of housing affect educational achievement and life opportunities for our children? Each Circle will also examine and deliberate on alternative policy choices for housing and schools in the metropolitan area.

This project was started in the fall of 1995 by members of MIAR's Education Task Force, beginning with a workshop on "Study Circles" held at the MIAR Inter-Faith Harmony Conference. The partners (see partial list at end of article) that have since joined the project share the belief that informed, civil dialogue and collective analysis -- across racial, economic and political lines -- is the best way to bridge differences and confront the changes taking place in our communities and schools today.

Talk about race and poverty is common-place, but the kind of talk that will help us begin to solve our problems together is not. There is also a need to build a "public voice" at the community level that contributes to public-policy making on the difficult issues of erasing the racial achievement gap in our schools and seeking alternatives to the socio-economic and racial segregation in our schools, housing and jobs. Using two successful models of community conversation and collaboration -- the "study circles" developed by the national Study Circles Resource Center and the Kettering Foundation's National Issues Forums (used with great success in communities around the country), and the "Communities of Color Empowerment Model" developed by the Minnesota Minority Education Partnership -- the "Community Circles" project will attempt to address these concerns. The community circle approach will provide a framework for discussion in which people from different backgrounds can respectfully but honestly exchange ideas and experiences and feel comfortable expressing their thoughts, yet work through difficult issues and move toward informed action.

The project will be launched with a forum for community sponsors in late November or December. Beginning in January, the community circles will be convened by the

sponsoring organizations and will meet for about 10 hours (3 to 5 meetings) over the next few months. Each group will include 5-15 members and will be as economically, ethnically, racially and regionally diverse as possible. The circles will be moderated by trained facilitators and will have a recorder. A common discussion guide is being prepared for use by all participants; however, each group will be encouraged to set its own agenda for subsequent circle discussion and request research on specific topics. A "charge" will be given to the community circles to deliberate on possible responses to the issues of race, housing and education currently vexing public officials and to find common ground. Following the community circle discussions, a second forum will be held in the Spring of 1997 to bring together the "voices" and share the findings and conclusions with the larger Twin Cities community, elected officials, the MIAR Leadership Board, and the boards of the other collaborating partner organizations.

In addition to the Minneapolis Initiative Against Racism, participating partners so far include the Urban Coalition, the Minnesota Minority Education Partnership, the Education and Housing Equity Project, the Metropolitan Interfaith Council on Affordable Housing, the University of Minnesota's Institute on Race and Poverty, the Minnesota Fair Housing Center, the Anti-Racism Initiative of the MN and Greater Minneapolis and St. Paul Council of Churches, Southside Neighborhood Housing Services, the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, Alliance of the Streets, the Suburban Hennepin Anti-Racism Coalition, the Minneapolis Public Schools, the Association of Metropolitan School Districts--West Metro Education Project (pending), the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning and several St. Paul organizations. National partners include the Kettering Foundation, the Study Circles Resource Center and the Center for Living Democracy.

For more information about the Community Circles Collaborative and opportunities to participate in the project, contact representatives of any of the participating organizations, or call Dick Little at INTER-RACE (724-5662 or 339-0820), Darcy Seaver at MICAH (871-8980 or 379-3602) or Bruce Vandel at MMEP (330-1509).

Program

- 9:00 a.m. **Greeting & Welcome**
Mayor Gail Dorfman, City of St. Louis Park
- 9:05-9:20 a.m. **Introduction**
The Honorable George Latimer
& Dr. Josie R. Johnson
- 9:20-10:00 a.m. **Setting the Stage**
Curt Johnson
Chair, Metropolitan Council
Yusef Mgeni
Executive Director, Urban Coalition
- 10:00-10:30 a.m. **Why They're Participating in
"Community Circles"**
Carol Johnson
Superintendent, St. Louis Park Public Schools
Julie Idelkope
Office of Mayor Sharon Sayles Belton
Hal Clapp
Southside Neighborhood Housing Services
Rep. Myron Orfield
Minnesota House of Representatives
Leonard Witt
Minnesota Public Radio
Rev. Steve Van Kuiken
Presbyterian Church of the Apostles, Burnsville
- 10:30-11:30 a.m. **Introduction to Community Circles**
- What is a "community circle"?
 - Video: The Story of Lima, Ohio
 - Goals and expected outcomes
 - What's involved in being a Sponsor
 - Project timetable

The Community Circle Collaborative cordially invites you to come learn more about this important community-wide dialogue and how you can sponsor one the many "community circles" that will be taking place throughout the metro area in early 1997.

What: An introduction to a metro-wide dialogue project in which at least 200 people from all walks of life join together - 5-15 at a time - in study circles held throughout the metro area to discuss the question: "How does racial and economic segregation of housing affect educational achievement and life opportunities?"

A typical community circle will include 5-15 members. Each community circle will be as economically, ethnically, racially, and politically diverse as possible. Each group will meet for a total of 10 hours and be led by a trained facilitator. A common *Discussion Guide* that includes presentations of a range of viewpoints and discussion questions will help move the discussion forward.

Who: As a Sponsor, you will join a growing collaboration of community-based organizations, public staff and officials, and individuals working in a variety of fields, including anti-racism, housing, education, social justice, religion, law, and social research. A sampling of our partners is listed on the back of this invitation.

Why: The partners that make up the Collaborative are coming together with a shared belief in the need for **civil, informed dialogue and collective analysis** - across all racial, economic, and political lines - about the challenges we face in our metro-area communities and schools. Our inspiration comes from successful, large-scale programs that have taken place around the country.

What would my role be?

To reach across the entire metro area, we need the help of a broad range of organizations and individuals who share our belief that - despite our many different opinions and perspectives - we can all benefit from participating in true dialogue and shared deliberation on these issues. As a Sponsor, you would help in five ways:

1. Help organize one or more study circles.
2. Recruit between 4 and 10 people for each community circle.
3. Arrange a site and meeting time for each community circle.
4. Recommend possible facilitators and recorders.
5. Help promote the program, including through bulletins, newsletters, and personal contacts.

This project is supported by grants from the Bush Foundation and Otto Bremer Foundation

*A sample of participating and pending partners
in the Community Circle Collaborative:*

The Minneapolis Initiative Against Racism

Mayor Sharon Sayles Belton

The St. Paul Human Rights Commission & Department

Minnesota Public Radio, Civic Journalism Initiative

The Education & Housing Equity Project

The Minnesota Minority Education Partnership

The Urban Coalition

The Minneapolis Public Schools

The Edina Public Schools

The St. Louis Park Public Schools

The St. Louis Park Housing Redevelopment Authority

The Suburban Hennepin Anti-Racism Coalition

The MN Churches Anti-Racism Initiative
(of the MN Council of Churches, the Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches, and
the St. Paul Area Council of Churches)

The Institute on Race & Poverty

The Metropolitan Interfaith Council on Affordable Housing (MICAHA)

Alliance Works/ Alliance of the Streets

The Minneapolis Center for Neighborhoods

The MN Fair Housing Center

Southside Neighborhood Housing Services

For more information about the Collaborative, contact:

Dick Little
Education & Housing Equity Project
122 W Franklin Ave #320
Minneapolis MN 55404
tel: 871-8980

Welcome!

Beyond Busing: A Metrowide Dialogue on the Challenges of Education and Housing Segregation



Kick-Off Forum

December 10, 1996

9:00-11:30 a.m.

St. Louis Park City Council Chambers

5005 Minnetonka Boulevard

St. Louis Park



January, 1990

RESOURCE BRIEF

What is a Study Circle?

Basic Format

A dozen people are comfortably seated around a living room or meeting room, one speaking, several others looking like they would like to make a point, one skimming an article as if searching for a particular item, another scanning the group, and the others listening attentively. This is a study circle in action.

In a study circle, 5-20 people meet several times to discuss the various choices our society or their organization might make

The study circle is a well-tested, practical, and effective method for adult learning and social change.

concerning a social or political issue. Complex issues are broken down into manageable subdivisions, and controversial topics are dealt with in depth.

Each discussion lasts approximately two hours and is directed by a well-prepared study circle leader whose role is to aid in lively but focused discussion. Participants receive in advance about an hour's worth of

reading material covering the topic for the session.

Two individuals, the organizer and the leader, are central to the creation and success of a study circle. The study circle organizer selects or develops the study circle course material, recruits participants, arranges the logistics of the meetings, and chooses the discussion leader. The study circle leader stimulates and moderates the discussion and guides the group toward the goals that it has agreed upon.

Philosophy and Background

The study circle is a well-tested, practical, and effective method for adult learning and social change. Study circles are voluntary, informal, democratic, and highly participatory. They assist participants in confronting challenging issues and in making difficult choices. Study circles engage citizens in public and organizational concerns, bringing the wisdom of ordinary people to bear on difficult issues. Cooperation and participation are stressed so that the group can capitalize on the experience of all its members.

The study circle is small-group democracy in action; all viewpoints are taken seriously and each participant has an equal oppor-

tunity to participate. The study circle belongs to the participants: individual members ultimately set the agenda and control the content of the discussions. The process – democratic discussion among equals – is as important as the content.

The goal of a study circle is not to impart enough facts to make the participants into experts, but rather to deepen their understanding and judgement by focusing on the values that underlie opinions. The reading material presents a variety of viewpoints and the leader encourages expression of personal views and experiences. The group "works through" difficult issues and grapples with choices. Common ground is sought in the end, but consensus or compromise is not necessary.

Suitability to a Variety of Organizations

Almost any organization can use a study circle to educate and empower its membership. Churches, civic and community groups, businesses, advocacy organizations, and unions have all used this small-group discussion format. Study circles are appropriate for a large national organization that may develop an original study circle course for 100 different discussion groups and for a small local group that may use a book for a single study circle.

A study circle will provide benefits for both the participants and the sponsoring organization. The participants gain knowledge, improve their communication skills, increase their self-esteem, and have a rewarding personal experience. For the sponsoring organization, a study circle

represents a valuable training opportunity that can improve participants' ability to advance the organization's interests and may increase their commitment to the organization. A study circle will also benefit an organization's leaders by providing valuable feedback and suggestions.

Variations on the Basic Format

There are many variations to the basic format for a study circle. The ideal study circle meets once a week for at least three sessions and rarely for more than five or six. While regular weekly discussions usually produce optimal results, other schedules can also work well. Some groups may want to combine a study circle with their regular monthly meetings. For those groups that cannot meet regularly, a workshop format can be used at a conference or a retreat with the entire study circle taking place in one or two days.

Videotapes or audiotapes as well as written material can be used to spark discussion. Small-group activities and exercises are included in some study circles to add variety to the sessions.

The strength of the study circle is its flexibility. Every group's situation is unique, and study circle organizers are encouraged to adapt the basic format to their communities and organizations in whatever way is appropriate.

A more in-depth presentation of the history, theory, and practice of study circles is given in a 20-page pamphlet, "An Introduction to Study Circles." Write or call for more information on the Study Circles Resource Center, its services, and its other publications.



For immediate release: May 1996

Contact: Matt Leighninger, (860) 928-2616

Study circle programs help communities rebuild democracy from the ground up

A presidential campaign often *seems* like a great opportunity to renew people's interest in the democratic process. Yet the empty posturing and combative tone of the presidential campaign are among the very things that have alienated large numbers of American citizens from government and from public life in general.

Instead of focusing exclusively on the presidential campaign and national issue debates, many civic activists are creating **community-wide study circle programs** to help citizens reconnect to public life at the *local* level. These programs create an opportunity for ordinary people to make a direct impact on public problems and political decision-making, which is one of the essential elements of democratic citizenship. By helping people first become active participants of their neighborhoods and communities, these programs lay the foundations for democracy on a national scale.

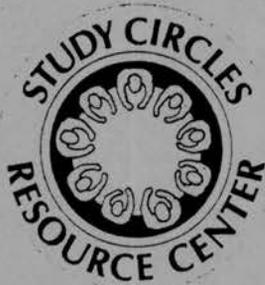
Study circles are small-group, democratic, highly participatory discussions. Organizers of large-scale study circle programs bring hundreds or even thousands of citizens into study circles to address issues such as education, race relations, and crime and violence. Community-wide study circle programs are underway in 19 cities, ranging in size from Orford, New Hampshire to Los Angeles. These programs aid community problem-solving at a number of levels, from greater individual volunteerism, to increases in small-group collaborations, to new city-wide policies and plans.

Study circles are grounded historically in the U.S. town meeting tradition and in the study groups of the Chautauqua era at the turn of the century. Community-wide study circle programs receive free consultation and discussion materials from the Study Circles Resource Center (SCRC), a project of the Topsfield Foundation of Pomfret, Connecticut.

Study circles help citizens gain "ownership" of the issues, and to begin thinking of themselves as members of a community capable of solving its problems. Through the discussions, citizens gain deeper understanding of others' perspectives and concerns. They discover common ground and a greater desire and ability to work together – as individuals, as members of small groups, and as voters and members of large organizations in the community. In this way, participants in community-wide study circle programs practice a more vital brand of citizenship that includes taking action as well as voting.

The success of this decentralized, citizen-based approach been touted by national figures such as U.S. Senator Bill Bradley (D-N.J.) and Children's Defense Fund President Marian Wright Edelman. Civic educators Frances Moore Lappé and Paul Martin Du Bois call the community-wide study circle model "one of the most dynamic and successful democratic practices in America today."

For more information on community-wide study circle programs, contact the Study Circles Resource Center at PO Box 203, Pomfret, CT 06258, (860) 928-2616, fax (860) 928-3713, e-mail <scrc@neca.com>.



For immediate release: February 1995

Contact: Matt Leighninger, (860) 928-2616

Cities use "study circles" to help citizens address public problems

Study Circles Resource Center gives free assistance to programs

Cities around the country have found a new method for confronting some of their most pressing problems. "Study circles" - small-group, democratic, highly participatory discussions - are helping public officials and others to engage citizens in public dialogue and problem-solving on issues such as crime, race, and education.

City-wide study circle programs, some of them involving thousands of people, are underway in places like Columbus, Ohio; Lima, Ohio; New Orleans, Louisiana; Springfield, Massachusetts; Aurora, Illinois; and Columbus, Indiana. The driving force is usually a coalition of community organizations, often including mayor's offices, human relations commissions, universities, councils of churches, and newspapers. Dozens of American cities are in the process of planning study circle programs.

These programs are using or adapting discussion guides published by the Study Circles Resource Center (SCRC) on issues like race relations, crime and violence, and education. For community-wide programs, SCRC offers **100 free discussion guides** and **free consultation** on how to create broad-based public involvement through study circles.

The success of this decentralized, citizen-based approach has gained the approval of Washington figures like Senator Bill Bradley (D-NJ). Speaking of SCRC's guide to *Confronting Violence in Our Communities*, Bradley said, "We must enlist all who love their communities and nation in a rebellion against violence that is waged locally, neighbor by neighbor, building by building. SCRC provides the kind of help we need to build the bonds of community that render violence moot."

Within the study circles, citizens discuss their firsthand knowledge of a problem, examine different views on what the root causes might be, and draw on those experiences and insights to decide what practical measures should be taken. Study circles lead not only to new ideas, but to the kind of broad-based public support and involvement that makes those ideas effective. By helping participants establish relationships within their communities on both a personal and an organizational level, study circles also contribute to that vital but less tangible process called "community-building." "Participants come out of the discussions fundamentally changed," says Lima (OH) Mayor David Berger. "This city will never be the same."

For information on study circle programs and discussion guides, contact the Study Circles Resource Center at PO Box 203, Pomfret, CT 06258, (860) 928-2616, fax 928-3713. SCRC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization funded by the Topsfield Foundation.

- END -

Route 169 P.O. Box 203 Pomfret, Connecticut 06258

(203) 928-2616 FAX (203) 928-3713



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LEARNING THE ARTS OF DEMOCRACY

Dialogue on Race Relations: Rebuilding Community

Many of us want to take part in constructive public dialogue, but have trouble knowing where to begin. Neutral, safe opportunities to work together as citizens on issues confronting us are not commonplace. As one community member in Lima, Ohio said, "It's not like you can walk up to someone on the street and say, 'Hey, what do you think about race relations?'"

It was during a period of increased racial tensions in the summer of 1992, that community leaders in Lima began to create ongoing opportunities for democratic discussions.

Lima Mayor David Berger called on the clergy of the city to help make dialogue on race a reality. Soon, the Mayor's Office, the Ohio State University at Lima, and a multiracial Clergy Task Force teamed up to initiate study circles—small-group, highly participatory, democratic discussions—on race relations. These organizing partners wisely agreed that they had to begin with a dialogue among themselves. Their genuine commitment to collaboration, multiple leadership, and democratic dialogue has been critical to the ongoing success of the dialogue in the wider community.

As the program took shape, study circle leaders were recruited through places of worship, and organized into racially diverse groups. Each study circle was scheduled to meet for several sessions of discussion, based on the framework in *Can't We All Just Get Along? A Manual for Discussion Programs on Racism and Race Relations*, developed by the Study Circles Resource Center.

As community members began to meet and engage in "public talk," they started an exciting process of personal growth and community connection.

By the end of the first phase of the study circles, almost 1,000 people had participated. Some groups have gone on to discuss race relations in greater depth; others have begun to consider other pressing community issues, such as crime and violence.

Even in the groups which did conclude their discussions, group members have continued the

new relationships they've begun. Study circle leaders, organizers, and participants celebrated their dialogue with a community picnic (a well-attended, though rainy, event). They even designed tee shirts and a "Can't We All Just Get Along?" float for the city parade!

Instead of "their issues," whites and blacks alike have begun to think in terms of "our issues".

During the past several months the Allen-Lima Leadership (the county/city community leadership organization) has

joined the effort. This growing community coalition is now creating opportunities for dialogue on race relations in schools, workplaces, hospitals, and neighborhood associations. The Mayor has set a goal of including 5,000 community members in study circles by the end of this year.

And the impact so far?

- **Individual change.** One high school participant talked about the personal growth she experienced as she explored her own cultural identity and, in the process, came to better understand herself and others. One of the study circle leaders, who had never before thought of himself as a "leader," discovered that he had a talent for facilitating interracial dialogue. Other study circle leaders have said that participation helped them to become more open about their feelings, and more willing to disagree without feeling threatened or threatening.

- **New interracial friendships and bonds.** The first two churches to pilot the study circles recently reaffirmed their bond with a "unity service," which drew people from all over the community and made it clear that people felt that they were part of a common cause.

- **New perceptions of community problems and how to approach them.** The Rev. McLemore of the St. Paul AME Church says that participants realize that "'those people' aren't the problem. In fact, they are the other part of the solution to the problems that we've been looking for. Instead of 'their issues,' whites and blacks alike have begun to think in terms of 'our issues.'" And he goes on: "Once people get past the issue of race, they start looking at the problems they have in common: How do we encourage our young people? How do we make sure that people can get decent jobs? How can we deal with crime in the streets?"

Clearly, the dialogue in Lima is changing the community. When relationships change in the context of public talk, people learn that other people's voices and ideas don't detract from their own, but are vital components of the community in its entirety. They learn to take others' differences as strengths. No wonder that Mayor Berger has said, "This city will never be the same."

By Martha McCoy, Study Circles Resource Center, PO Box 203, Pomfret, CT 06258. (203)928-2616.

The Mayor has set a goal of including 5,000 community members in study circles by the end of this year.



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The Times

SHREVEPORT ■ BOSSIER CITY ■ ARK-LA-TEX

A Gannett
newspaper

Improving race relations is an important issue in cities nationwide. In this third of a four-part series, we take a look at how Lima, Ohio, is facing down its race problems.

SEARCH FOR
SOLUTIONS

City bonds to fight racism

■ Lima, Ohio finds plan that's working.

By **DUNSTAN PRIAL**
The Times

LIMA, Ohio — On the morning after four white police officers were acquitted in the video-taped beating of black motorist Rodney King — 1,500 miles removed from the burning and looting in South Central Los Angeles —



Berger

■ More on
Lima, 8A

Lima, Ohio, Mayor David Berger arrived to work early. Fearing that a planned protest march through downtown Lima that day would escalate into violence, Berger called together the prominent members of the city's clergy — both black and white.

Sporadic incidents of racial strife in the 1970s and 1980s had left what city officials now describe as "an underlying tension" just below the surface of Lima's apparently calm status quo.

And despite its location — nestled in rolling farmland midway between Dayton and Toledo — Lima, a typical Midwestern city of about 45,000, was not immune to the big city scourges of gangs and drugs.

Resentment stemmed from various sources.

Many African-American residents believed media accounts of

the city's crime perpetuated the common perception that problems exist only in minority communities.

White residents, meanwhile, openly warned visitors not to remain in Lima's largely minority populated downtown neighborhoods after dark.

It's too early to say for certain, but that meeting in the spring of 1992 may have served as the catalyst for a profound change in the relationship between blacks and whites in Lima. The mayor discovered at the meeting that racial divisions existed even in Lima's religious community. To Berger's surprise, many of the black and white ministers had to be introduced.

It was time the city — with a 25 percent black population and its past history of racially tinged violence — took a hard look at race relations, the mayor says now. "I realized we needed to make an honest attempt to somehow understand the problem and work on a resolution."

Nearly three years have passed since Berger decided to face race relations head on, and while no one in Lima would suggest perfect racial harmony exists, a stable and expanding foundation has been laid for increased and ongoing dialogue between blacks and whites.

Study circles

"Perception is reality," says Rev. Lamont Monford, pastor at Philipian Missionary Baptist Church, a predominantly black congregation on Lima's economically depressed southside.

Perceptions, however, are sometimes inaccurate, especially among the races, Monford said.

But how does a community, much less a nation, clear up those perceptions when blacks and whites have so little contact? Why not just sit down and talk?

Enter the role of study circles.

Study circles is a concept founded in early 1992 by the Study Circles Resource Center in Pomfret, Ct. It is an elaborate program with a simple goal — bring together small groups of diverse people for open dialogues on differences between them.

Dr. Carol Fasig, director of Continuing Education at Ohio State University at Lima, had recently obtained a copy of the study circles pamphlet when she was contacted in 1992 by Berger's office and asked to participate in improving race relations in Lima.

"It was a perfect fit," she says now of the study circles program.

Lima officials decided that the church community, because of its spiritual base and structured foundation, was the place to start. It has proved to be a wise decision.

Initially, eight leaders from two Lima churches — the predominantly black St. Paul African Methodist Episcopal and predominantly white Zion Lutheran — were trained to run study circles.

The first meeting, in January 1993, attracted 45 people. The meetings continued over four sessions in a structured order designed to cover specific issues, said Ron Hagaman, an administrative assistant to Mayor Berger charged with oversight of the study circles program.



Monford

In small groups of 10 to 12 people, black and white participants spent two hours discussing topics they likely had never before raised with members outside their race.

The emotionally charged issue of affirmative action, for example, was discussed in terms of white and black perspectives on the pros and cons of systematic efforts to provide opportunities to minorities, Hagaman said. Trained leaders prevented the discussion from degenerating into finger pointing arguments.

"The book we used to establish the program said we could do it with all white groups. That's a bunch of baloney. You have got to have blacks sitting across from whites," he said.

Discussing racism

The first topic participants covered was each member's earliest recollection of how race or racism affected them. Hagaman said the level of honesty reached early on between group members was startling.

Walls of perception came tumbling down, and perceived differences were discovered to be shared values.

Participants learned that drug abuse and gangs exist in both the white and black communities.

More obscure, perhaps, but no less important were discussions on interracial dating and marriage. Black and white parents expressed concerns not so much for the interracial relationships, but for how those relationships would be received in the community, and the affect that reception would have on mixed couples and their children, Monford said.

■ See PLAN, Page 8A

SEARCH FOR SOLUTIONS

Plan a 'perfect fit' for Lima

■ Continued from Page 1A

"What happened in the study circle groups was that it put a name and a face to the perception and the statistics," said Monford, whose church participated in the second phase of the program. "People became aware of what was happening across town and to the real people involved."

The pilot program was expanded first to 38 churches and now involves 49 and some 1,200 people.

City officials and members of the clergy had no idea the program would catch on with such enthusiasm. By the end of the second or third study circles meetings, group members were invariably apprehensive about what direction to take next.

At that point, the city administration and the clergy leaders stepped out of the way. Said Mayor Berger: "We told them, 'We don't know. Go do it.'"

And they have. Study circles have led to ice cream socials, black and white ministers exchanging pulpits and congregations for a day, shared worship on common holidays, and a skating and study program attended by black and white children.

What's more, it's led to simple, every day friendships between people who might never have met.

Jessie Lee Long, a 58-year-old African-American, told of comforting a white woman whose husband warned her not to travel to the mostly black neighborhood where the study circle was being held. "I told her she had nothing to be afraid of," Long said.

"The people who participated didn't say 'Can we keep this go-

ing?'" said the Rev. James McLemore, Pastor at St. Paul A.M.E., one of the pilot churches. "They said we can't stop this."

It's people at the grass-roots level who are keeping the momentum going, McLemore said. "It's a relationship that has developed between these people. They've touched each other."

No one involved in the program claims study circles will reach everyone who needs it. In fact, they acknowledge that the most disenfranchised of Lima's community — on both sides of the racial spectrum — have barely been touched.

But with the program expanding into the schools and the business community, the dialogue can't help but eventually reach "everyone from the redneck to the radical," McLemore said.

Added Berger: "We don't pretend to have thought out, understood, or have the ability to get to everyone. But we've made an honest and aggressive beginning."



Special to The Times/KEITH CIRIEGIO

A man visits the Our Daily Bread kitchen in Lima, Ohio.

'Day of Dialogue' Tries to Span Racial Gulf

■ **Diversity: Across L.A., small groups meet to talk frankly—and to listen.**

By JANE GROSS
TIMES URBAN AFFAIRS WRITER

With widespread agreement across Los Angeles that racial rifts are widening, this divided city set aside Tuesday to discuss the undiscussable: the fears and prejudices that have run rampant in the three weeks since the O.J. Simpson verdicts.

At nearly 100 sites across the city—churches and synagogues, schools and workplaces, community organizations and public auditoriums—Angelenos of all races and ethnicities gathered in small groups from early morning until late at night and, supervised by trained mediators, tried to abandon platitudes and talk frankly about race and how it has disfigured their lives and fragmented their city.

The Day of Dialogue on Race Relations, as the citywide talkathon was dubbed by its originator, Councilman Mark Ridley-Thomas, was a hastily assembled event. But it nevertheless managed to attract thousands of residents troubled by the fissures of race and ethnicity that have plagued the city for years but have widened in the wake of the Simpson verdicts and the subsequent "Million Man March" last week in Washington.

"If we don't make it work here in L.A., we are in trouble," said Father Pedro Villarroja, a Spanish-born official in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles, who turned out for bagels, coffee and strained conversation in the law library at the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California, one of the day's host organizations. "I don't know where World War III will start, but it may be because of race."

Juanita Fleming, a neighborhood activist in Pico-Union who attended the same group, agreed.

"I feel sorry for us as a nation and a city," said Fleming, who is of mixed Mexican and Filipino descent and married to a white man. "It is getting worse, not better, and if we don't start interacting and communicating, we're not going to get through this."

Some of those who attended the discussion groups were liberal advocates or men and women involved in government and public policy, who acknowledged that they were preaching to the choir. But many of them said that even in their offices and social circles, the Simpson verdicts had unleashed racist remarks, flowing in all directions, rarely vocalized in progressive circles since the civil rights movement.

"The shock of the verdict caused a veneer to slip," said Carolyn Webb de Macias, chief of staff to Ridley-Thomas. "People are saying things to each other that they wouldn't have said three weeks ago."

Along with the public activists at Tuesday's discussion groups, there were neighborhood folks, along with the well-known ministers, anonymous parishioners; along with the city leaders, firefighters and clerks and college students at sites that included the Los Angeles Conservation Corps, Loyola Marymount University, Kol Tikvah Synagogue, the Watts Towers Art Center and the Victory Outreach Ministry, where Sen. Bill Bradley joined the gang members and ex-convicts.

"I believe the dialogue has to be deepened," the New Jersey Democrat said.

Some participants in the day's activities said that rather than racist talk, a heavier-than-usual curtain had fallen between the races in the wake of the verdicts. That was the consensus at the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, where 20 office workers spoke of the "uncomfortable silence that has reigned in the MTA lunchroom and in their neighborhoods in recent days."

"We were so afraid about what would happen to our personal relationships if we discussed those issues, because there are such deep feelings around them," said Phyllis Tucker, an African American MTA administrator.

And silence breeds misunderstanding. "What you think we think is not necessarily what we think; we just don't express ourselves," said Patricia Helm, a white MTA worker.

Some of Tuesday's exchanges were heated, which was encouraged by the mediators, local men and women trained by a Connecticut-based foundation called the Study Circles Resource Center, which has organized such racial round-tables in many small cities around the country, but never in a place so huge, complicated or divided as Los Angeles.

At the ACLU breakfast, for instance, two of the whites in the group, Laurrie Garner, an elderly neighborhood resident, and Capt. Nick Salicos of the Los Angeles Police Department's Rampart Division, seemed out of sync with the Latinos and African Americans as to whether race and ethnicity even matter.

Garner began the heated exchange by saying that she "loathed and despised" the need of some people to emphasize their ethnicity, to call themselves African Americans or Asian Americans. "That's like saying, 'We're American, but . . .'" she said. "It's



KEN LUBAS / Los Angeles Times

Jean Tillman, left, holds the attention of her Metropolitan Transportation Authority colleagues during one of the many dialogues on race.

all those classifications that are tearing us apart."

She also blasted bilingual education and the tedium of translation from one language to another at various civic meetings. "If we don't communicate in the same language, we can't solve our problems."

Salicos similarly complained about groups insisting on their own identity. "Within our organization, we're all blue," Salicos said. "I wish that were the view of people in L.A., because I see what happens when people clamor for their own racial identity. I don't see why we have to get so hung up on background."

The nonwhites in the group took quick and angry exception. Conrado Terraza, a field organizer for Councilwoman Jackie Goldberg, noted that "my reality is that race does matter. You control the system. It's your system. No matter how successful I am, no matter how much money I make, I am always a Latino."

Then Sol Castro, a high school teacher, exploded. "Ma'am," he said, directing his remarks at Garner. "I've seen some of our kids dye their hair blond to pass for white and wear tinted contact lenses to make their eyes blue. When I wanted to play the saxophone in high school, the teacher said my lips were too fat. Don't tell us race doesn't matter!"

The grievances of the various ethnic groups were consistent from one end of the city to the other. African Americans told tales of others shunning them, as if fearful that everyone of their race was a mortal danger. At a discussion at the Los Angeles Conservation Corps, Bernie Wilsdon complained that white women tuck their purses under their arms at the sight of him. Oscar Voner described white drivers seeing him at intersections and locking their doors. And

Deona Tucker said that when she's shopping, clerks follow her around the store.

The primary complaint among Latinos was that they felt absent from the dialogue in Los Angeles since the verdicts, when all the talk has been of black versus white. "You've left us out; you treat us like we were invisible," said Juanita Fleming, at the ACLU group.

Whites, for their part, dwell on the injustices of affirmative action and the rhetoric of Louis Farrakhan, who led the "Million Man March." Typical of the first was Dave Rogers, a fireman who attended a discussion at a Downtown station house and said he had to wait three years to get hired while minorities found instant openings in the department. Typical of the second was an elderly woman at the Kol Tikvah synagogue in Woodland Hills who said it was "chilling" to hear that a man such as Farrakhan can rise to power.

Organizers of the day's events seemed buoyed by the turnout and the candor. But no one was predicting that one day of talk would work miracles. "We won't wake up Wednesday and say, 'Hallelujah, it's over,'" said Avis Ridley-Thomas, the councilman's wife, who runs the Dispute Resolution Program in the city attorney's office.

But miracles aside, there were small victories: One of the groups at the ACLU has scheduled a second gathering in a few weeks. One white man at a lunchtime discussion group at the city attorney's office vowed to organize social events with people of other races, because his contact with them now is limited to work hours. And groups all over the city that were set to meet for an hour or two instead talked into the afternoon.

"I think people were ready," said Councilman Ridley-Thomas. "And it's long overdue, long overdue. Residents of this city don't want to be stuck in this racial abyss."

Times staff writers Tony Olivo, Erin Texeira and Miles Corwin contributed to this story.