



## Education and Housing Equity Project Records.

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"We need to develop a regional civics that is not about governmental entities. It's about citizens, community groups, businesses, and government agencies coming together to act in the common interest of the region."

– William Barnes, coauthor of *The U.S. Common Market*

## **I. Executive Summary: Principal Findings and Directions for the Future**

A great experiment in democracy is underway in Minneapolis/St. Paul. Since December 1996, over 350 residents of the Twin Cities metropolitan area have been involved in the Choices for Community program, the first effort of its kind to bring citizens of an entire *region* together to deliberate on difficult regional issues. The program is being organized by the Community Circle Collaborative, a cross-sector coalition of over 30 Twin Cities organizations.

In their Community Circles – small, participatory, democratic discussions – citizens addressed issues surrounding educational and residential segregation. Participants shared their hopes, concerns, and recommendations at a Community Forum held in May 1997.

This fall, another round of Community Circles will begin. The program's organizers and sponsoring organizations are determined to bring many more people into these vital discussions. Based on findings from the first round, the program will also facilitate more opportunities for participants to join in implementing the solutions they develop. With the foundation laid in the first year, the second will become a greater springboard for action at the neighborhood and community levels.

## II. Background: The Community Circle Collaborative

*"It couldn't happen here." Not in Minneapolis-St. Paul, the political home of Hubert Humphrey: Minnesota, America's sane heartland. . . . The Twin Cities was immune to urban decline, inner-suburban decay, urban sprawl – and the polarization that has devastated and divided older, larger regions. After all, we were not Chicago, Detroit, or Milwaukee. We were reform minded, and our philanthropic and governmental centers were coordinated and responsive. Then the 1980s hit, marking our Twin Cities with identical patterns of regional polarization. . . . If it could happen here, no American region is immune. Once polarization occurs, the concentration of poverty, disinvestment, middle-class flight, and urban sprawl grow more and more severe.*

*-- Myron Orfield, Metropolitcs (1997: 1, emphasis added)*

State Legislator Myron Orfield was one of the first citizens in the region to realize that Twin Cities communities were becoming increasingly polarized along the lines of race and class. Changes in regional school districts pointed to serious issues of equity in both housing access and public education.

It is within this context that the Community Circle Collaborative (CCC) was launched. CCC is a metro-wide dialogue project that engages citizens from all walks of life, 8-12 at a time, in study circles held throughout the metro area. Originally a partnership among EHEP, the Minneapolis Initiative Against Racism (MIAR), the Minnesota Minority Education Partnership (MMEP), and the Minnesota Fair Housing Center, the CCC initiative has expanded into a wide-ranging coalition of community-based organizations, public staff and officials, and individuals working in a variety of fields, including social justice, race relations, housing, education, religion, law and social research.

The Collaborative's members were united by their interest in two central questions:

- What are the impacts of existing patterns of residential, economic and racial segregation on the educational achievement and life opportunities of Twin Cities area children and families?
- What can or should we do, as individuals and as a community, to enhance educational success and housing and economic opportunities for *all* children in the Twin Cities area?

*The diversity in our state is greatest among children . . . . So this is a long curve. We'd better start getting some of the answers right now, because they're going to affect an entire generation.*

*– Vivian Jenkins Nelsen, INTER-RACE*

### A. What is a Community Circle?

The Community Circle process is one way help a community achieve new levels of citizenship and civic action. Large-scale Choices for Community programs – often referred to as study circle programs – have been used all over the country to generate reasoned dialogue, decisive policy input, and grass-roots problem-solving.

The impacts of these programs range from new friendships, to neighborhood projects, to city-wide action plans, to new legislation. An evaluation of a study circle program in Greater Cleveland showed basic changes in attitude as a result of the study circles. Study circle participants in Lima, Ohio have done everything from building new playgrounds to changing the makeup of a regional development board. A

state-wide study circle program in Oklahoma helped the state legislature enact sweeping changes in the criminal system.

Community circles, or study circles, are democratic, highly participatory discussion groups which meet several times to address a critical public issue. The discussions are facilitated, and they follow a framework laid out in a discussion guide specific to that issue. The participants talk about how the issue affects them, then consider some of the larger questions surrounding the issue, and, finally, discuss how they might take action on the issue. Successful organizers have been able to mobilize large numbers of citizens – a “community-wide” program in a medium-sized city can involve roughly 1,000 people in 75-100 circles.

While community-wide study circle programs have taken place in many cities and towns, and state-wide study circle programs have taken place in Maine and Oklahoma, the Twin Cities Community Circles project is the first attempt at a region-wide program. With the ascendance of regional issues such as segregation, urban sprawl, and transportation to the forefront of policy debates across the nation, a region-wide model is a much-needed innovation.

*We face our greatest challenges at the neighborhood, regional, and global levels. Our governments are structured to address challenges at the local, state, and national levels.*  
– William Dodge, *Regional Excellence*

Why are these public conversations so unusual? In part, it's because most of what we see today in the media and in public meetings is “positioning” or “posturing.” The purpose of this style is to advocate one point of view or another, at the expense of dialogue and, often, of decorum. Although widely accepted in the media, this type of communication ultimately leads to public cynicism and withdrawal from the political process. Not many people want to compete in such a contrived forum. Community circles offer a refreshing change from the narrow and often restrictive discussions of the past and the competitive debates encouraged by the political process.

*People acting as citizens create new ways of working together and new ways of taking responsibility for what is publicly all of ours.*  
– Dick Little, Education and Housing Equity Project

The community circles process recognizes that agreement is not necessary in order for a conversation to be successful. It is necessary for participants to listen, reflect, and speak from both the head and the heart. Mutual respect and a belief in the enlightening and healing nature of sharing ideas – across boundaries of ethnicity, geography, age, gender, socioeconomic status and even language – can go a long way toward making a conversation rewarding for the community as well as the individuals involved.

In many cultures, circles are symbols of equality, fairness and completeness. The underlying premise of the Community Circles Collaborative process is that solutions to serious and often divisive issues can be found if we put aside our fears and prejudices and work together.

## **B. The Need: Residential and Educational Segregation in the Twin Cities**

The Education and Housing Equity Project (EHEP), the [lead?] partner in the Community Circle Collaborative, was created in early 1995 by a group of education and housing advocates who shared a belief in the pressing need to link the issue of school desegregation with the broader issue of housing and neighborhood segregation. EHEP's mission is to act as a catalyst to build broad-based coalitions and

engage the community in public conversations about and advocacy for promotion of racially and economically inclusive communities that give families of all incomes, races and ethnic backgrounds access to schools and housing throughout the metropolitan area.

*The reason it's critical that we talk is because words have different meanings to different people, and we have different levels of interpretation and reflection from our own experience, our history, our expectations, our own knowledge of where we can go.*

– Dr. Josie Johnson

A few alarming facts highlight the nature and depth of the concerns they wished to address:

- The proportion of people of color who live in poverty is higher in Minneapolis/St. Paul than in any other central city in the nation: 37 percent of African-Americans, 40 percent of Native Americans, 32 percent of Latinos.
- Concentrations of poverty and income disparities between the region's central cities and its suburbs are also among the highest in the nation. The poverty rate in Minneapolis is 18.5 percent, in St. Paul 16.7 percent, but in the suburbs it is only 4.5 percent.
- The central cities are home to only 22 percent of the children enrolled in regional schools, but to 55 percent of the region's impoverished elementary school children.
- Between 1970 and 1984, the population of the metro area increased by 9.7 percent but the land it occupied increased by 25.1 percent.

The organizations which have joined the Community Circle Collaborative may have widely-diverging views about how to solve these problems. However, all of the partners share a common concern about the issue of segregation, and a commitment that residents of the Twin Cities region must be actively engaged in addressing it.

*We know that poverty isn't going anywhere, and racism isn't dead.*

– Vivian Jenkins Nelson, INTER-RACE

### C. Chronology of CCC Events

The Community Circle Collaborative is now more than a year old. A brief chronology of its activities and related events appears below.

**December 1996:** The "Beyond Busing" Kick-Off Forum was held for project sponsors. This event was attended by more than 100 people representing a wide variety of organizations: churches, advocacy groups, academia, public agencies and foundations. Significantly, the event took place in the suburbs (in the St. Louis Park City Council chambers), making it clear from the beginning that this was not a central-city effort but a metro-wide effort. The first two speakers, former St. Paul Mayor George Latimer and education expert Josie Johnson, Ph.D., helped to set the context of the project and to encourage and motivate participants. The two speakers who followed them, Curt Johnson, chair of the Metropolitan Council; and Yusef Mgeni, President of the Urban Coalition, provided information and insights regarding the breadth and depth of segregation problems and costs in the metropolitan area. Following the speakers, individuals representing the state legislature, an outer-ring suburban church, an inner-ring suburban school, a nonprofit housing developer, the media and the Minneapolis Mayor's Office all

described why they planned to participate in the project and urged others to join them. As the event concluded, many new sponsors submitted their pledges to participate by organizing study circles.

**February 1997:** Training for study-circle facilitators was held, and the first Discussion Guide for participants was issued.

**March-June 1997:** Study circle discussion groups met 3-5 times each to discuss the two questions given above. Each group produced a brief report summarizing its discussion and findings. Nearly 350 people participated in these discussions.

**May 1997:** CCC held a Community Forum at Macalester College in St. Paul. This forum was attended by many of the individuals who had participated in study circles and gave them a chance not only to share the results of their deliberations and but also to explore the extent of commonalities among the different groups. The Forum featured Martha McCoy, the Executive Director of the (national) Study Circles Resource Center, whose presentation was followed by two "conversations." The first, moderated by Vivian Jenkins Nelsen, President and CEO of INTER-RACE, focused on the first study-circle question (regarding impacts); the second, moderated by George Latimer, addressed the second question, which focuses on potential solutions. (Section III of this report summarizes the findings of all the study circles.)

**June 1997:** The Institute on Race and Poverty delivers to the McKnight Foundation a report entitled "Examining the Relationship Between Housing, Education, and Persistent Segregation." This report identifies the Twin Cities region as one of the ten most segregated metropolitan regions in the United States.

*The Twin Cities have reached an important time to consider which path it will follow. This community has already begun to creep down the path so familiar to many large urban areas. If the Twin Cities community is to reverse its course, it must begin now. This community must seriously examine and confront what is happening here, and it must come together for real, proven solutions.*

— The Institute on Race and Poverty, University of Minnesota

**July 1997:** All study circle reports were submitted to EHEP. In addition, facilitators and group organizers completed a questionnaire intended to help the study-circle organizers to learn more about the process — successes as well as difficulties — and to glean suggestions concerning how better to proceed in the next round of discussions.

**July-October 1997:** Individual participants who represented interested groups made presentations to their respective organizations, local communities and constituencies.

**September 1997:** The National Conference on Race Relations and America's Public Education System takes place. One of the discussion sites is the Twin Cities. Among the practical issues identified are housing segregation, economic inequity, and the need for long-term solutions rather than quick fixes.

*Spring 1998*  
**April 1998:** The final report of the first round of study circles, "Beyond Busing: The First Metrowide Dialogue on the Challenges of Education and Housing Segregation," is issued.

*Choices For Community: A Regional Twin Cities Office of  
The CCC co-sponsors local discussions with the National Conference of Christians and Jews at Minneapolis and St. Paul public schools.*

### III. Study Circle Reports

#### A. Issues

*We are in very deep denial. We believe we aren't like Detroit, but we are;  
it's just happening more slowly here.*

– a community circle participant

The necessary first step in trying to solve thorny social problems is to ensure that those problems are understood in much the same way by all. Therefore, the Community Circles focused their attention first on identifying the issues.

The problem areas identified by CCC participants fell into four fairly distinct groupings:

- Issues related to regional growth and equity in terms of investment, employment and social relations;
- Systemic issues related to housing segregation and neighborhood quality;
- Systemic issues related to education; and
- Issues that arise primarily at the level of the individual.

A small degree of liberty has been taken to clarify meaning or to combine similar thoughts expressed in different ways by more than one participant or study circle. Every effort has been made, however, to retain the essence of what appeared in the study circle reports.

Issues shown in italic type were identified by more than one study group.

#### 1. *Issues of regional growth and equity*

When asked to determine how many societies the Twin Cities have become, people responded in two different ways. One group suggested that we have become "three societies: The very rich, working people, and the poor." Another described it differently: "Two – those who work and those who don't." Regardless of how it is said, though, there was a strong recognition among participants that the region has become polarized into distinct, and often mutually distrusting, camps.

The issues that appear in this grouping deal with the broad context of regional equity ~ and inequity. They cluster around three topics: investment, employment and social relations.

##### **Investment:**

Spatial mismatch between available fiscal and economic resources and high-order fiscal and social needs – for example, northern part of region needs more infrastructure

Biases in business lending that shortchange women- and minority-owned businesses

Need for more entrepreneurship programs, e.g., micro-loans, money circles

*Perceived and real disadvantages of central-city sites, due to crime, presence of pollutants and an unskilled workforce*

*A focus on the short-term and the bottom line, disregarding long-standing evidence that a "rising tide" does not lift all boats*

Shortage of businesses that are committed to being good corporate citizens

Growth containment affects provision and cost of infrastructure

*Suburbanites like to have the benefits of the city but do not like to pay for them.*

– a community circle participant

**Employment:**

*Spatial mismatch between available jobs and many of the unemployed – e.g., the northern part of the region needs to provide more jobs*

*Biases in job hiring and wage-setting practices*

*Shortage of reverse-commute options that can take inner-city workers to suburban jobs*

*Shortage of quality affordable child care, especially at "non-traditional" work times*

*Changing workforce demographics: more persons of color, more seniors, more women supporting households*

*Challenge presented by people who are physically or psychologically unable to "work a 9-5 job"*

*Under-recognition by business that well-trained employees lead to greater profitability*

*Lack of benefits with many part-time and low-wage jobs*

*Jobs accessible to residents of poor communities often go to outsiders*

*Lack of sufficient interest in and support for entrepreneurship in minority and poor communities*

**Social relations:**

*Distortions and stereotypes in media reporting*

*Reporting of crime that is disproportionate to its occurrence*

*Need for true justice that is timely, fair and makes wise use of parole and community-service options*

✓ *Polarization reinforced by racial categories on government forms*

*General breakdown of family structure and cohesion due to economic demands, lifestyle choices, decline in community support*

*Perceived need to keep track of people with criminal records (e.g., community right-to-know regulations for known sex offenders)*

*Tendency for people to remain close to their support networks*

*Decline in traditional values, especially a decline in personal integrity and responsibility*

*Lack of courage to make wise but unpopular decisions*

*Churches can perpetuate values but are not always good role models.*

– a community circle participant

**2. Systemic issues related to housing and neighborhoods**

*italics ←* There was a generally high level of consensus on housing and neighborhood issues, which clustered around two topics: housing stock and neighborhood environment. By far the most often-cited issue was that of exclusionary suburban zoning and development practices, which were mentioned specifically by one-fourth of the reporting groups.

*The people who can afford to pay taxes live out in the suburbs, and the inner city has been getting poorer and poorer. It will continue until there is some massive political determination that we're going to make our inner cities the most attractive places to live, or at least as attractive for all kinds of people as the suburbs are.*

– a community circle participant

**Housing:**

- Lack of investment in poor or declining neighborhoods
- Poor housing stock that repels stable families, discourages investment
- Lead-based paint and other health hazards
- Lack of neighborhood diversity in housing types, which leads to homogeneous populations
- Inflexible central-city zoning and other regulations that prohibit use of many vacant/abandoned buildings as shelter*
- Shortage of affordable housing*
- Punitive rental property taxes
- High cost of land
- Poor enforcement of existing fair housing laws
- Lack of awareness of opportunities and options among low-income households

*In Minneapolis, the government is sponsoring the destruction of affordable housing, through zoning, through licensing, through housing codes. The city has destroyed countless affordable neighborhoods.*

— a community circle participant

**Neighborhood environment:**

- Unequal power in neighborhood/community relations*
- Inadequate resources for general maintenance, including trash pick-up and yardwork
- Lack of resources to facilitate neighborhood involvement
- Transience caused by poor housing stock, low incomes*
- Land-use plans that give highest priority to accommodating cars (e.g., intrusive highway routes)
- Inadequate transit service (frequency, hours, direct routing and choice of destinations)*
- Exclusionary suburban zoning regulations (e.g., minimum lot size and square footage, garage requirements, development fees)*
- Redlining (insurance, lending, cab service, police response)*
- Crime and perceptions of crime*
- Need to improve conditions for those who "remain behind"

*More affluent neighborhoods [have] essentially accepted socioeconomic redlining.*

— a community circle participant

**3. Systemic issues related to education**

Perspectives on the shortcomings of the educational system were quite diverse but fall into two groupings: One focuses on the in-school experience, the other on the interaction between the school and the surrounding community.

**The school as educational institution:**

- Teachers not living in the communities *ies they teach*
- Few opportunities to experience diversity
- Institutional discrimination: students receiving differential treatment due to race/color, learning ability, economic status, perceived intelligence, and/or athletic ability, which can lead to artificially raised or lowered expectations
- Focus on short-term results when long-term solutions are needed
- Failure to teach the basics
- Lack of adequate [curriculum] structure

Classes that are too big  
 Inability to sustain children's enthusiasm for school beyond 3rd or 4th grade  
 Too few minority teachers  
 Insufficient counselors and inadequate counseling  
 Schools being asked to do far more than teach academics  
 Lack of effective means of dealing with children from "problem" situations; at-risk children  
 "falling through the cracks"

*Where we do get the minorities to move out into the suburbs, they have the money, they have the wherewithal, but we . . . have a problem in the sensitivity of our teachers and our educational system . . . One of the biggest problems that [minority kids] are finding is that their teachers are prejudiced. So we move out into the suburbs, and what we encounter are teachers who will not be fair with these kids . . . They're also scared of being in school, because they're afraid of being called names, and if there's a fight, they get kicked out. So there's a racial imbalance.*

←  
 — a community circle participant

**The school in the community:**

The school system is not user-friendly or parent-friendly  
 Transience disrupting children's stability, ability to learn  
 School violence (e.g., children carrying weapons)  
 Unequal distribution of school resources, both within and between school districts  
 Perception that central-city schools are underfunded  
 Special challenges presented by schools impacted by concentrated poverty  
 Lack of adequate transportation/transit, which results in reduced access to extra-curricular activities and school choice  
 The public-school monopoly – lack of competition and choice  
 Poor nutrition among school children  
 Language barriers among recent immigrants  
 Under-educated, over-worked parents who cannot adequately help their children  
 [Household] stability affects academic achievement  
 Need for transitional housing to support schools

continuity of the learning experience

←  
 ←  
 ←  
 You can't learn if you are hungry.

←  
 ←  
 ←  
 — a community circle participant

**4. Issues related to individuals**

These issues reflect more general concerns about the state of our society as a whole as well as the plight of individuals within it. Some of these issues are pandemic – that is, they plague people in all races, classes and locations; others are more specific to particular circumstances, especially the circumstances of those living in areas of concentrated poverty.

**Society-wide issues:**

Substance abuse and addiction  
 Breakdown in the institution of marriage  
 Lack of recognition for different family types, e.g., extended families  
 Lack of self-esteem in children due to inadequate parenting  
 Lack of respect for the rights, beliefs and property of others

*Lack of respect for teachers and other elders*  
 Fear leading to isolation, high levels of stress  
 Negative stereotyping  
 Racism  
 Denial of racism/segregation problem  
 Need for more welcoming in the community

*The white teachers don't like us.  
 When a white kid does something good, they get praised.  
 When we do something good, they say nothing.*

— a community circle participant

**Issues more common in areas of concentrated poverty:**

Low incomes/joblessness leading to extralegal economic activity  
 Poor parental supervision of children and lack of other supportive/responsible adults  
 Lack of employed role models  
 Individuals focused on day-to-day survival unlikely to make education a top priority  
 Unwillingness or inability to take personal responsibility (e.g., in housing: use of illegal subleases and presence of unaccounted-for tenants)  
 Lack of pride in surroundings  
 High level of mobility leading to instability in family, education  
 Inability to set and work toward goals  
 Entitlement mentality promoted by welfare dependency  
 Victim mentality promoted by discrimination and dependency

*Describing the problems of the inner city as a result of abstract 'racism' is not helpful because fighting 'racism' seems a futile exercise.*

— a community circle participant

**B. Potential solutions**

*We decided early on that the issues of housing, education and jobs were not mutually exclusive, and that if we had to do anything, we had to do all of them . . . . One of the things we said is that if the economic bottom line drives the process, then a rising economic tide should diminish segregation. But does it?*

— a community circle participant

The potential solutions that appear here should be regarded as a valuable first cut. As the Community Circles Collaborative proceeds with its second round of discussions, new efforts will be made to help them develop meaningful and effective responses to those issues.

It is also important to remember that many potential solutions are implicit in the issue statements. For example, to address the issue described as "biases in business lending that shortchange women- and minority-owned businesses," a potential solution might be to work to eliminate those biases, or to find other ways to make more investment capital available to women and minorities.

Again, as was the case with the issues, every attempt has been made to capture the essence of what emerged from the discussants, while also combining and clarifying ideas where appropriate.

*When something isn't working, try something new.*

– a community circle participant

### **1. Employment and opportunity**

Suggestions for increasing employment and economic opportunity generally addressed broad topical categories, such as entrepreneurship and child care.

Adopt the OxFam approach that sets up micro-loan and revolving credit programs ("money circles") among groups of inner-city residents. This will help to foster entrepreneurship.

Increase funding for women- and minority-owned businesses.

Require basic benefits with all full-time jobs.

Offer incentives to lenders to make business and home loans to low-income persons.

Recruit corporations as community partners that can help to provide transportation to job sites, child care, and job offers to center-city residents.

Improve the transit system by expanding reverse-commute options and using a wider variety of vehicle and service types (e.g., company vans, vanpools, dial-a-ride systems, bus-service rerouting).

Expand the funding for and availability of adequate child care.

*We found ourselves going back and forth. First, someone would say, well, it's an economic solution we need here, or it's an economic cause of this problem. And then right away someone else would counter with, it's lack of community, it's 'heart' things. What we eventually came up with is that we have to have solutions that are addressed to both sides of the problem, because one or the other isn't going to do it.*

– a community circle participant

### **2. Societal relations and resources**

Suggestions related to social relations focused on communities of faith and sources of information:

Partner churches to offer and encourage multi-cultural experiences for their congregations.

Provide anti-racism training and materials for media staff members.

Work more through communities of faith and rely more on faith-based programs, which are [often] more successful than comparable secular programs.

Keep public libraries open for longer hours, especially evenings and weekends.

*Congregations need to move 'outside the congregational walls.'*

– a community circle participant

### **3. Housing and neighborhoods**

The most logical breakdown of potential solutions in this category is between housing and neighborhoods.

#### **Housing:**

Mix small apartment buildings with other housing types in new developments.

Allow mixed-use zoning that permits people to live, for example, above stores.  
 Increase the flexibility of various codes to assist large families, for example by allowing three persons in each bedroom.  
 Increase the number of duplexes and triplexes with resident owners. <sup>+ necessary housing</sup>  
 Fund experiments in shared living.  
 Expand the supply of transitional housing.  
 Experiment with ways to reduce the profit motive vis-a-vis construction and rehabilitation of affordable housing.  
 Reinstitute some kind of fair-share housing requirement regionwide.  
 Put teeth in the Livable Communities Act and the Community Reinvestment Act.  
 Provide better and more consistent code enforcement.  
 Increase resources to make landlords accountable for repairs and treatment of tenants.  
 Offer more widespread down-payment assistance to persons of limited means.  
 Couple household support programs with housing choice and subsidy.  
 Test "money circles" as a source of funding for home improvements and other family/household needs.  
 Experiment with payment-assistance programs, similar to existing utility-assistance programs (e.g., voluntary payments by utility customers to help those in need).

#### **Neighborhoods:**

Pair seniors and young parents so they can get to know one another and exchange services, for example swapping occasional child care for lawn mowing  
 Expand and support Neighborhood Watch programs.  
 Improve emergency support systems, as well as awareness of and access to them.

*People like to be with people like themselves.*

– a community circle participant

#### **4. Education**

Ideas for improving public education ran the gamut from those promoting general improvement for all students, regardless of race or socioeconomic status, to those specifically targeting at-risk youngsters from a wide variety of backgrounds. These suggestions fell into several groupings: curriculum and teaching, student support, school choice, recognition of diversity and community relations.

*If we go back to neighborhood schools, poverty areas must have the best, strongest teachers.*

– a community circle participant

#### **Curriculum and teaching improvements:**

Teach all students life skills, such as money management, parenting, how to look for a job and how to select appropriate housing.  
 Eliminate state curriculum standards except for testing.  
 Require academic tests at the elementary, middle-junior high and senior high school levels.  
 Rate schools on academic achievement.  
 Develop different learning tracks, including at least one that provides a good education to those who will not go to [an academic]college.  
 Expand work-study opportunities that do not allow teen-agers to work in fast-food places – for

example, home construction/rehabilitation.  
 Encourage/recruit corporate sponsorships and internships. Involve businesses in helping students better visualize careers and career paths and learn the skills they will need.  
 Educate students for civic participation.  
 Require community-service hours, even before high school.  
 Equalize school-district spending per child.  
 Lengthen both the school day and the school year.

*It is time to leave the premise that everyone is qualified to attend college. It is very important for our country to have mechanics, plumbers, carpenters and others who perform such useful tasks. Dignity is in all work and unfortunately that has been lost.*

←  
 - a community circle participant

**Student support:**

Move away from a "fix the kid" approach to a "fix the system" approach.  
 Enhance programs that prevent drop-outs.  
 Offer more tutoring.  
 Expand mentoring programs.  
 Expand after-school activities, especially in the fine and performing arts and other non-athletic program areas.  
 Get truants off the streets and into a community center, workplace or community-service setting.  
 Require uniforms (although not necessarily "traditional" ones).  
 Provide better and more plentiful counseling that is more holistic and incorporates help with chemical abuse.  
 Sponsor "burning issues" clubs, lunches or other time to help youngsters deal with issues at home.

*Kids are afraid to go to school because of racism, they're afraid because of sexism, homophobia . . . When they're there, the children are so worried about, am I going to get to my next class, am I going to get home, am I going to get beat up on the way home, am I going to have my lunch money for lunch - that learning is secondary.*

- a community circle participant

**School choice:**

Allow children to go to any [public] school they want.  
 Support community schools - "stop busing madness."  
 "Bus for programs, not for numbers."

*Teachers in the public school system are very unprepared for kids of color. Training needs to address not only multiculturalism but it needs to address some of the factors of poverty and how they impact on kids. They need to look at learning styles. They need to look at how they as teachers can facilitate involvement by parents and community members.*

- a community circle participant

**Diversity:**

Fund learning opportunities that bring together or pair students from divergent backgrounds.

Use instruction and programs focused on the environment and ecology to bring together all groups in the community in a common concern and in common enterprise.

← +  
artr

Train teachers in cultural competency.

Imbue the curriculum with diversity, rather than making diversity a "special event" or giving it superficial treatment.

Offer scholarships to students of color who agree to come back and teach for a minimum period of time.

**Community relations:**

Experiment with "peer parent" and buddy programs that help newcomers feel less isolated and become more involved in their children's schools.

Strengthen the non-educational/pre-school support system that helps to relieve problems in the schools, which consists of programs like Head Start, parenting education, mentoring, quality child care and non-school recreation.

Incorporate community facilities, such as community centers, social service centers and health-care facilities, within or adjacent to schools to give everyone a "stake" in the success of those schools.

park +  
rec  
fac./prog

*I remember when there were three black teachers in the Minneapolis public schools. And yet there were students of color that were going through that school system, combating racism as individuals, and going on to become successful participants in society. We can blame a lot of things on racism, but let's not fall into the trap of using that as an excuse for a lack of achievement.*

←

- a community circle participant

#### IV. Preparing for the Future

*I think a lot of white people believe, but sometimes don't feel that we can say it, that racism is probably a relatively minor cause of the relatively poor performance of minority kids . . . . It would be incredibly naive to discount the impact of racism on minority kids in our schools, but it seems to me far more significant causes are the breakdown of the African-American family and the lack of role models for young kids. And the sports culture I think is even more important than racism, the idolization of athletes, and the belief that African-American boys in the Minneapolis public schools have – something like 85 percent feel they can have careers in professional sports . . . . But we don't ever talk about any of those other issues.*

– a community circle participant

An important and meaningful dialogue has begun, all across the Twin Cities, and people of good will from all backgrounds are thinking about economic and racial disparities with great intensity.

The community circles generated a profile of many of the important issues. The Community Circle Reports (Section III of this report) contain a wealth of information, insights and ideas that can be used to propel further exploration of the role of race, changing economics and spatial segregation on housing and education throughout the region. They also developed a long and varied list of action ideas.

The community circle process also proved its value through the responses of most participants, who viewed it as a valuable experience they would like to continue or repeat.

There were, however, some weaknesses in the first round of community circles, including a lower level of action outcomes than in similar programs in other communities. This section of the report provides some analysis of the program and recommendations for the second round of community circles.

##### **Recommendation #1: Strengthen the action component**

As is evident in Section III of this report, community circle participants talked a great deal about action. They developed long lists of action ideas, in the areas of employment and opportunity, societal relations and resources, housing and neighborhoods, and education. Unfortunately, it appears that few of those participants went on to try to implement any of the action ideas. It is also unclear whether the views of participants had any effect on public policy decisions. This runs counter to the results of study circle programs in other communities.

##### **A. Improve the final session of the guide**

The final session of the *Choices for Community* guide, which was used in all the community circles, led participants through a process of listing the areas of tension or conflict and the areas of agreement that they had come to in their discussions. The volunteer recorder in each group was then asked to summarize these thoughts on a record that was submitted to the Community Circle Collaborative.

In study circle guides produced by the Study Circles Resource Center, the final session includes a range of action ideas, divided into categories according to what individuals can do, what small groups can do, what institutions can do, and what communities as a whole can do. Those action lists span a range of political viewpoints and are meant simply to assist the study circle in its brainstorming about what action ideas fit best in their community.

The final session of the revised *Choices for Community* guide should include such a list, as well as discussion questions that help participants prioritize those ideas and think about what roles they can play on the neighborhood, community, and regional level.

### **B. Improve the recording process**

Good records from each community circle can be a valuable asset for structuring an action forum, preparing a report that condenses the deliberations, and giving policy input to public officials.

The records submitted from the community circles varied widely in their length, focus, and level of detail. A certain amount of unevenness is to be expected, but more consistency and uniformity would have been extremely helpful. The new *Choices for Community* guide should include simple forms built into each session, giving each recorder specific guidance in how they report the findings of the group.

For the next round, the facilitators should be asked to lead their groups through a summarizing process at the end of each session. This brings the wisdom of the whole group to bear in the recording process, and ensures that the records capture the ideas of the group and the spirit of collaboration.

### **C. Hold a true action forum**

In May 1997, a forum was held for the participants in the first round of community circles. Due to scheduling constraints, that forum occurred before all of the groups had finished their four sessions of deliberation. More importantly, the forum was not structured as an action forum; rather, it was intended to create a large-group deliberation on segregation issues. While some attendees learned a great deal at the forum, it did not prove to be a springboard for action efforts.

A true action forum should be held at the conclusion of the second round of community circles. The Study Circles Resource Center suggests:

"The action forum at the end of each round of study circles is your most important opportunity to galvanize problem solving efforts. At the kickoff, announce the date of the action forum. Invite the study circle participants, coalition members, area organizations working on the issue, and other community members. Use the study circle records to identify themes which emerged from the groups. At the action forum, give people the opportunity to sign up for task forces on those themes. For example, the task forces for a program on race might focus on themes such as improving police-community relations, reducing bias crime, and dealing with race relations among young people. Ask people with some professional expertise in each topic to join that task force. If you are writing a report based on the study circle records, the action forum is an excellent time to release it.

After the action forum, it is critical for program organizers to stay in touch with the task forces. Help them get off the ground by identifying convenors and setting meeting dates. To keep task force efforts in the public eye, create a newsletter which reports on their progress, and encourage newspapers and television stations to cover their work. Provide ways for newcomers to join task forces as the program moves along. The study circle program in Lima, Ohio, went even further, winning a grant from the Ohio Bureau of Justice Services to fund a Violence Prevention Center. The Center was designed to provide staff time to support the eleven task forces which arose from the study circle program. Finally, it is important to celebrate the task force achievements and build on them. One way to do this is through periodic large-group meetings."

- excerpted from *Focus on Study Circles*, Winter 1998

#### **D. Include more policymakers in the study circles**

The experience of other communities has shown that a study circle program has its greatest effect on policymaking if public officials themselves are among the participants in the groups. In that way, their authority and expertise is brought into the process, but public officials are treated like fellow human beings rather than experts who have the potential to solve problems by themselves. Their wisdom is included in the mix, but they are not put on the spot. Rather than being treated as the distant recipients of formalized public input, they are treated as powerful collaborators in addressing common problems.

#### **Recommendation #2: Create circles which include both city-dwellers and suburbanites**

One of the most innovative aspects of the Community Circle Collaborative program is its focus on regional issues. Segregation in housing and education is an issue with a regional scope, requiring deliberation and action by people in multiple communities. However, the majority of the community circles were limited to people who lived or worked in a particular area. This made it much more difficult for suburbanites to understand the concerns of city-dwellers, and vice versa.

During the second round, institutions could be paired so that each study circle included people from more than one community. For example, a church in Minneapolis with 10 people signed up to participate could be paired with a suburban Kiwanis Club bringing 10 people. The institutions could meet at either site, and split their pool of 20 people into two community circles. ←

Paired cross-regional community circles would probably make the experience more unique, illuminating, and exciting for participants. In addition, action groups or task forces which emerged from the action forum or the community circles themselves would be more likely to combine city-dwellers and suburbanites. That kind of cooperation, in itself, would make a statement to the rest of the region.

#### **Recommendation #3: Improving racial, ethnic, and gender diversity**

##### **A. Race and ethnicity**

The full group of participants (350+) was fairly representative of the Twin Cities community as a whole in terms of race/ethnicity. However, individual groups did not reflect this diversity. As a result, some participants perceived that the process was not representative. A number of comments were made regarding how "the right people aren't here."

Several methods of improving racial and ethnic diversity might be used. One would be to invite the participation of secular service clubs and congregations that are known to appeal to members of particular groups. Another would be to pair congregations and other sponsoring organizations to promote racial and ethnic intermingling. A third would involve deliberately assigning volunteers of one heritage to join a discussion group dominated by another. Because it is safe to presume that the vast majority of participants are persons of good will and intent, finding volunteers willing to cross barriers should not be difficult. (Besides, isn't that the whole point of this exercise – crossing barriers?)

##### **B. Gender**

The group of participants as a whole was not well-balanced by gender. Men made up only about one-fourth of the participants. The all-female memberships of a couple of study circles even remarked on the absence of male counterparts and asked what could be done to "get the men here."

Although gender imbalance is not uncommon for a volunteer group of this type, gender imbalance needs

to be addressed in the next round of circles. One possible approach would be to specifically invite participation by male-dominated clubs or the men's groups from various faith communities.

#### **Recommendation #4: Give more training and support to facilitators**

The reports from the circles, and the surveys completed by the facilitators themselves, suggest that the quality of facilitation was uneven. This is one of the potential pitfalls of using volunteers, but it need not be a fatal one.

EHEP could turn to professional facilitators to conduct the next round of meetings, but this is not necessary nor even particularly wise. What is needed is better training and support for volunteer facilitators. For example, at least one facilitator complained that the group he or she led frequently strayed from the topic – without any apparent understanding that it is the job of the facilitator to keep the group focused and moving, so it can produce the results it wants within the allotted time.

The facilitator training process and packet reflect this failure to teach the basics. Training emphasized the content of the sessions and cultural considerations – both critical topics, to be sure, but not to the exclusion of learning how to lead a productive meeting, keep the group focused, mediate conflict, and handle difficult people (“difficult” here referring to any number of problems, including glibness, silence, stonewalling, attempts to dominate, etc.).

*Getting people involved in addressing public issues is not a “nice” thing. . . .  
What you want people to say is not that it is a nice thing to do  
but that it's an absolutely necessary thing to do.*

*– Martha McCoy, Study Circles Resource Center*

Given that some of the facilitators are relatively inexperienced, having a monitor present to step in and redirect the group's energy can be invaluable. A monitor can keep an eye on several groups at a time and keep tabs on the clock as well. The monitor's presence allows each facilitator to engage fully in the group's discussion and ensure that both substance and direction remain relevant. Moreover, should any facilitator encounter difficulty with a particular group – belligerence, refusal to focus, etc. – someone else is present to mediate and help the group get moving in positive ways again. The presence of a monitor can aid neophyte and experienced facilitators alike.

In CCC's case, the difficulties in using monitors are logistical: If each group is meeting at its own place and time, it is simply infeasible for a single monitor to be present. Neither would this be an efficient use of anyone's time. Moreover, the number of monitors available will necessarily be limited by the need for each one to be highly experienced in facilitation and/or team leadership. These difficulties could be overcome through a different approach to scheduling discussions.

#### **Recommendation #5: Schedule all meeting times in advance**

Ironically, it is possible that individual groups were given *too much* latitude in scheduling their own meetings – which means that each person's dentist appointment, TV viewing habits, softball league, family demands, vacation and other prior commitments interfered with circle meetings. Multiply this effect by ten or fifteen circle members, and it becomes clear why scheduling was a problem.

Rather than leaving the scheduling decision wide open, it may be more effective to set up group meeting times in advance. For example, meetings in each round of discussions could be slated to take place at one of four or five predetermined times at one of four or five predetermined locations. Discussants would be

asked to select one of those times and places to participate, either for the entire series or on a meeting-by-meeting basis. Advance sign-ups would probably be necessary in order to make sure that all time slots have enough participants; otherwise, intended participants would have to be notified of a change in plans.

Although this approach might entail some additional work on the part of the organizers, it might also eliminate some work by eliminating confusion about who is meeting where, and when. Moreover, sponsoring organizations would remain heavily involved in coordinating meetings and keeping track of participants.

Adopting an approach similar to this one could produce several benefits:

- It would impose some discipline on the groups and indicate that the study circles are not a social event that takes place only when everyone is free, but a formalized process with demands of its own.
- It would allow coordinators to balance the sizes of the circles, eliminating problems caused by poor attendance in some groups while others overflow.
- It would allow individuals who might miss one set time to "make up" a session at a different time, thus facilitating participation in the entire series of discussions.
- It would allow individuals to sample different locations, if desired, thus exposing them to a much wider range of viewpoints and ideas.
- It would enable the circle coordinators at any given location to balance racial and gender representation more effectively, either by pairing sponsoring organizations or by randomly assigning incoming individuals to different discussion groups.
- It would allow for the efficient use of monitors in support of facilitators.
- It would put everyone on essentially the same timetable, with a clear beginning and a clear end.

One potential drawback to this approach is that some groups would lose the continuity and, hence, the familiarity that foster trust and openness. However, the process itself can help to encourage such openness. Moreover, most discussion groups will probably remain essentially intact throughout the entire series due to individual choices.

## **VI. Appendices**

- A. Background on EHEP, CCC**
- B. Findings of facilitator questionnaire**
- C. List of sponsors and participants**

[Dick, anything I should add here from SCRC?]

Report on the  
1997 Community  
Circle Discussion  
- Revised -

## I. Executive Summary: Principal Findings and Directions for the Future

## II. Background: The Community Study Circle Collaborative

*"It couldn't happen here." Not in Minneapolis-St. Paul, the political home of Hubert Humphrey: Minnesota, America's sane heartland. . . . The Twin Cities was immune to urban decline, inner-suburban decay, urban sprawl -- and the polarization that has devastated and divided older, larger regions. After all, we were not Chicago, Detroit, or Milwaukee. We were reform minded, and our philanthropic and governmental centers were coordinated and responsive. Then the 1980s hit, marking our Twin Cities with identical patterns of regional polarization. . . . If it could happen here, no American region is immune. Once polarization occurs, the concentration of poverty, disinvestment, middle-class flight, and urban sprawl grow more and more severe.*

*-- Myron Orfield, Metropolitica (1997: 1, emphasis added)*

State Legislator Myron Orfield was one of the first citizens in the region to realize that Twin Cities communities were becoming increasingly polarized along the lines of race and class. Changes in regional school districts pointed to serious issues of equity in both housing access and public education.

It is within this context that the Community Circle Collaborative (CCC) was launched. CCC is a metro-wide dialogue project that engages citizens from all walks of life, 5-15 at a time, in study circles held throughout the metro area. Originally a partnership among EHEP, the Minneapolis Initiative Against Racism (MIAR), the Minnesota Minority Education Partnership (MMEP), and the Minnesota Fair Housing Center, the CCC initiative has expanded into a wide-ranging coalition of community-based organizations, public staff and officials, and individuals working in a variety of fields, including social justice, race relations, housing, education, religion, law and social research.

CCC's study circles have been charged with discussing two central questions:

- What are the impacts of existing patterns of residential, economic and racial segregation on the educational achievement and life opportunities of Twin Cities area children and families?
- What can or should we do, as individuals and as a community, to enhance educational success and housing and economic opportunities for *all* children in the Twin Cities area?

These are the two critical questions facing the Twin Cities region as it moves toward the 21st Century.

*The diversity in our state is greatest among children . . . . So this is a long curve. We'd better start getting some of the answers right now, because they're going to affect an entire generation.* -- Vivian Jenkins Nelson, INTER-RACE

## A. What is a Community Study Circle?

The Community Circle Collaborative process is one way to sample the broadest possible spectrum of opinions within a community. It is also an effective way to generate informed conversations that can lead to new levels of citizenship and civic action. This process has been used all over the country to create a public voice about important issues and to help ensure that that voice is heard by decision-makers. Without the effort to bring people together for informed and civil conversation, the most extreme voices are free to frame the issues. Public-spirited conversation will be drowned out by shrill debate, our communities will become even more polarized, and our common interests and values will get lost in a sea of opposition and conflict. There is a need to create a public voice that recognizes our common interests and generates consensus about, or at least informed consent to, policies and actions designed to further the common good.

Why is this public conversation important? In part, it's because most of what we see today in the media and in public meetings is "positioning" or "posturing" -- that is, highly stylized communication. The purpose of this style is to advocate one point of view or another, at the expense of dialogue and, often, of decorum. Although widely accepted in the media, this type of communication ultimately leads to public cynicism and withdrawal from the political process. Not many people wish to become strident enough to compete in such a contrived forum. Community circles offer a refreshing change from the narrow and often restrictive discussions of the past and the competitive debates encouraged by the political process.

To "converse" means to "share words with others". It carries the implication of equality of opportunity and status, and of the give-and-take of exchange. Conversations, which shares ideas, thoughts and perspectives, are intended to lead to understanding. They help to clear the air by honestly reflecting the differences and similarities among the conversants.

The study circle is a well-tested, practical method for adult learning and social change. In a study circle, 5-20 people meet several times to discuss the various choices the community might make concerning a social or political issue. Complex issues are broken down into manageable pieces, and controversial topics are dealt with in depth. Each discussion lasts about two hours and is directed by a well-prepared discussion leader whose role is to aid in lively but focused discussion. The process is informal, democratic and highly participatory, so that the group can capitalize on the experience of all its members.

*People acting as citizens create new ways of working together and new ways of taking responsibility for what is publicly all of ours. -- Dick Little, Education and Housing Equity Project*

The community circles process recognizes that agreement is not necessary in order for a conversation to be successful. What *are* necessary are listening, reflecting, and speaking from both the head and the heart. Mutual respect and a belief in the enlightening and healing nature of sharing ideas -- across boundaries of ethnicity, geography, age, gender, socioeconomic status and even language -- can go a long way toward making a conversation rewarding for the community as well as the individuals involved. Moreover, they can become vehicles for community problem-solving and development of action coalitions, composed of individual citizens, community organizations, the business community and government, that are better able to effect meaningful change for the better.

In many cultures, circles are symbols of equality, fairness and completeness. The underlying premise of the Community Circles Collaborative process is that solutions to serious and often divisive issues can be found if we put aside our fears and prejudices and work together.

## B. The Need: Residential and Educational Segregation in the Twin Cities

The Education and Housing Equity Project (EHEP) was created in early 1995 by a group of education and housing advocates who shared a belief in the pressing need to link the issue of school desegregation with the broader issue of housing and neighborhood segregation. EHEP's mission is to act as a catalyst to build broad-based coalitions and engage the community in public conversations about and advocacy for promotion of racially and economically inclusive communities that give families of all incomes, races and ethnic backgrounds access to schools and housing throughout the metropolitan area.

*The reason it's critical that we talk is because words have different meanings to different people, and we have different levels of interpretation and reflection from our own experience, our history, our expectations, our own knowledge of where we can go.*

— Dr. Josie Johnson

A few alarming facts highlight the nature and depth of the concerns they wished to address:

- ❑ The proportion of people of color who live in poverty is higher in Minneapolis/St. Paul than in any other central city in the nation: 37 percent of African-Americans, 40 percent of Native Americans, 32 percent of Latinos.
- ❑ Concentrations of poverty and income disparities between the region's central cities and its suburbs are also among the highest in the nation. The poverty rate in Minneapolis is 18.5 percent, in St. Paul 16.7 percent, but in the suburbs it is only 4.5 percent.
- ❑ The central cities are home to only 22 percent of the children enrolled in regional schools, but to 55 percent of the region's impoverished elementary school children.
- ❑ Between 1970 and 1984, the population of the metro area increased by 9.7 percent but the land it occupied increased by 25.1 percent.

## C. Chronology of CCC Events

The Community Circle Collaborative is now more than a year old. A brief chronology of its activities and related events appears below.

**December 1996:** The "Beyond Busing" Kick-Off Forum was held for project sponsors. This event was attended by more than 100 people representing a wide variety of organizations: churches, advocacy groups, academia, public agencies and foundations. Significantly, the event took place in the suburbs (in the St. Louis Park City Council chambers), making it clear from the beginning that this was not a central-city effort but a metro-wide effort. The first two speakers, former St. Paul Mayor George Latimer and education expert Josie Johnson, Ph.D., helped to set the context of the project and to encourage and motivate participants. The two speakers who followed them, Curt Johnson, chair of the Metropolitan Council; and Yusef Mgeni, President of the Urban Coalition, provided information and insights regarding the breadth and depth of segregation problems and costs in the metropolitan area. Following the speakers, individuals representing the state legislature, an outer-ring suburban church, an inner-ring suburban school, a nonprofit housing developer, the media and the Minneapolis Mayor's Office all described why they

planned to participate in the project and urged others to join them. As the event concluded, many new sponsors submitted their pledges to participate by organizing study circles.

**February 1997:** Training for study-circle facilitators was held, and the first Discussion Guide for participants was issued.

**March-June 1997:** Study circle discussion groups met 3-5 times each to discuss the two questions given above. Each group produced a brief report summarizing its discussion and findings. Nearly 350 people participated in these discussions.

**May 1997:** CCC held a Community Forum at Macalester College in St. Paul. This forum was attended by many of the individuals who had participated in study circles and gave them a chance not only to share the results of their deliberations and but also to explore the extent of commonalities among the different groups. The Forum featured Martha McCoy, the Executive Director of the (national) Study Circles Resource Center, whose presentation was followed by two "conversations." The first, moderated by Vivian Jenkins Nelsen, President and CEO of INTER-RACE, focused on the first study-circle question (regarding impacts); the second, moderated by George Latimer, addressed the second question, which focuses on potential solutions. (Section III of this report summarizes the findings of all the study circles.)

**June 1997:** The Institute on Race and Poverty delivers to the McKnight Foundation a report entitled "Examining the Relationship Between Housing, Education, and Persistent Segregation." This report identifies the Twin Cities region as one of the ten most segregated metropolitan regions in the United States.

*The Twin Cities have reached an important time to consider which path it will follow. This community has already begun to creep down the path so familiar to many large urban areas. If the Twin Cities community is to reverse its course, it must begin now. This community must seriously examine and confront what is happening here, and it must come together for real, proven solutions. — The Institute on Race and Poverty, University of Minnesota*

**July 1997:** All study circle reports were submitted to EHEP. In addition, facilitators and group organizers completed a questionnaire intended to help the study-circle organizers to learn more about the process -- successes as well as difficulties -- and to glean suggestions concerning how better to proceed in the next round of discussions.

**July-October 1997:** Individual participants who represented interested groups made presentations to their respective organizations, local communities and constituencies.

**September 1997:** The National Conference on Race Relations and America's Public Education System takes place. One of the discussion sites is the Twin Cities. Among the practical issues identified are housing segregation, economic inequity, and the need for long-term solutions rather than quick fixes.

**April 1998:** The final report of the first round of study circles, "Beyond Busing: The First Metrowide Dialogue on the Challenges of Education and Housing Segregation," is issued.

### III. Study Circle Reports

#### A. Issues

*We are in very deep denial. We believe we aren't like Detroit, but we are; it's just happening more slowly here.*

The necessary first step in trying to solve thorny social problems is to ensure that those problems are understood in much the same way by all. The Community Circles Collaborative therefore focused its study groups' initial attention on issue identification and discussion.

The issues identified by CCC participants fell into four fairly distinct groupings:

- Issues related to regional growth and equity in terms of investment, employment and social relations;
- Systemic issues related to housing segregation and neighborhood quality;
- Systemic issues related to education; and
- Issues that arise primarily at the level of the individual.

A small degree of liberty has been taken to clarify meaning or to combine similar thoughts expressed in different ways by more than one participant or study circle. Every effort has been made, however, to retain the essence of what appeared in the study circle reports.

Issues shown in italic type were identified by more than one study group.

#### 1. *Issues of regional growth and equity*

When asked to determine how many societies the Twin Cities have become, people responded in two different ways. One group suggested that we have become "three societies: The very rich, working people, and the poor." Another described it differently: "Two -- those who work and those who don't." Regardless of how it is said, though, there was a strong recognition among participants that the region has become polarized into distinct, and often mutually distrusting, camps.

The issues that appear in this grouping deal with the broad context of regional equity -- and inequity. They cluster around three topics: investment, employment and social relations.

##### **Investment:**

Spatial mismatch between available fiscal and economic resources and high-order fiscal and social needs -- for example, northern part of region needs more infrastructure  
Biases in business lending that shortchange women- and minority-owned businesses  
Need for more entrepreneurship programs, e.g., micro-loans, money circles  
*Perceived and real disadvantages of central-city sites, due to crime, presence of pollutants and an unskilled workforce*

*A focus on the short-term and the bottom line, disregarding long-standing evidence that a "rising tide" does not lift all boats*

Shortage of businesses that are committed to being good corporate citizens  
Growth containment affects provision and cost of infrastructure

*Suburbanites like to have the benefits of the city  
but do not like to pay for them.*

**Employment:**

*Spatial mismatch between available jobs and many of the unemployed -- e.g., the northern part of the region needs to provide more jobs*

Biases in job hiring and wage-setting practices

Shortage of reverse-commute options that can take inner-city workers to suburban jobs

*Shortage of quality affordable child care, especially at "non-traditional" work times*

Changing workforce demographics: more persons of color, more seniors, more women supporting households

Challenge presented by people who are physically or psychologically unable to "work a 9-5 job"

Underrecognition by business that well-trained employees lead to greater profitability

*Lack of benefits with many part-time and low-wage jobs*

Jobs accessible to residents of poor communities often go to outsiders

Lack of sufficient interest in and support for entrepreneurship in minority and poor communities

**Social relations:**

*Distortions and stereotypes in media reporting*

*Reporting of crime that is disproportionate to its occurrence*

Need for true justice that is timely, fair and makes wise use of parole and community-service options

Polarization reinforced by racial categories on government forms

General breakdown of family structure and cohesion due to economic demands, lifestyle choices, decline in community support

Perceived need to keep track of people with criminal records (e.g., community right-to-know regulations for known sex offenders)

Tendency for people to remain close to their support networks

*Decline in traditional values, especially a decline in personal integrity and responsibility*

Lack of courage to make wise but unpopular decisions

*Churches can perpetuate values  
but are not always good role models*

**2. Systemic issues related to housing and neighborhoods**

There was a generally high level of consensus on housing and neighborhood issues, which clustered around two topics: housing stock and neighborhood environment. By far the most often-cited issue was that of exclusionary suburban zoning and development practices, which were mentioned specifically by one-fourth of the reporting groups.

*The people who can afford to pay taxes live out in the suburbs, and the inner city has been getting poorer and poorer. It will continue until there is some massive political determination that we're going to make our inner cities the most attractive places to live, or at least as attractive for all kinds of people as the suburbs are.*

**Housing:**

Lack of investment in poor or declining neighborhoods  
Poor housing stock that repels stable families, discourages investment  
Lead-based paint and other health hazards  
Lack of neighborhood diversity in housing types, which leads to homogeneous populations  
*Inflexible central-city zoning and other regulations that prohibit use of many vacant/abandoned buildings as shelter*  
*Shortage of affordable housing*  
Punitive rental property taxes  
High cost of land  
Poor enforcement of existing fair housing laws  
Lack of awareness of opportunities and options among low-income households

*In Minneapolis, the government is sponsoring the destruction of affordable housing, through zoning, through licensing, through housing codes. The city has destroyed countless affordable neighborhoods.*

**Neighborhood environment:**

*Unequal power in neighborhood/community relations*  
Inadequate resources for general maintenance, including trash pick-up and yardwork  
Lack of resources to facilitate neighborhood involvement  
*Transience caused by poor housing stock, low incomes*  
Land-use plans that give highest priority to accommodating cars (e.g., intrusive highway routes)  
*Inadequate transit service (frequency, hours, direct routing and choice of destinations)*  
*Exclusionary suburban zoning regulations (e.g., minimum lot size and square footage, garage requirements, development fees)*  
*Redlining (insurance, lending, cab service, police response)*  
*Crime and perceptions of crime*  
Need to improve conditions for those who "remain behind"

*More affluent neighborhoods [have] essentially accepted socioeconomic redlining.*

### 3. *Systemic issues related to education*

Perspectives on the shortcomings of the educational system were quite diverse but fall into two groupings: One focuses on the in-school experience, the other on the interaction between the school and the surrounding community.

#### **The school as educational institution:**

- Teachers not living in the community
- Few opportunities to experience diversity
- Institutional discrimination: students receiving differential treatment due to race/color, learning ability, economic status, perceived intelligence, and/or athletic ability, which can lead to artificially raised or lowered expectations
- Focus on short-term results when long-term solutions are needed
- Failure to teach the basics
- Lack of adequate [curriculum] structure
- Classes that are too big
- Inability to sustain children's enthusiasm for school beyond 3rd or 4th grade
- Too few minority teachers
- Insufficient counselors and inadequate counseling
- Schools being asked to do far more than teach academics
- Lack of effective means of dealing with children from problem situations; at-risk children "falling through the cracks"

*Where we do get the minorities to move out into the suburbs, they have the money, they have the wherewithal, but we . . . have a problem in the sensitivity of our teachers and our educational system . . . One of the biggest problems that [minority kids] are finding is that their teachers are prejudiced. So we move out into the suburbs, and what we encounter are teachers who will not be fair with these kids . . . They're also scared of being in school, because they're afraid of being called names, and if there's a fight, they get kicked out. So there's a racial imbalance.*

#### **The school in the community:**

- The school system is not user-friendly or parent-friendly
- Transience disrupting children's stability, ability to learn
- School violence (e.g., children carrying weapons)
- Unequal distribution of school resources, both within and between school districts
- Perception that central-city schools are underfunded
- Special challenges presented by schools impacted by concentrated poverty
- Lack of adequate transportation/transit, which results in reduced access to extra-curricular activities and school choice
- The public-school monopoly -- lack of competition and choice
- Poor nutrition among school children
- Language barriers among recent immigrants
- Under-educated, over-worked parents who cannot adequately help their children
- [Household] stability affects academic achievement
- Need for transitional housing to support schools

*You can't learn  
if you are hungry.*

#### **4. Issues related to individuals**

These issues reflect more general concerns about the state of our society as a whole as well as the plight of individuals within it. Some of these issues are pandemic -- that is, they plague people in all races, classes and locations; others are more specific to particular circumstances, especially the circumstances of those living in areas of concentrated poverty.

##### **Society-wide issues:**

*Substance abuse and addiction*  
Breakdown in the institution of marriage  
Lack of recognition for different family types, e.g., extended families  
Lack of self-esteem in children due to inadequate parenting  
*Lack of respect for the rights, beliefs and property of others*  
*Lack of respect for teachers and other elders*  
Fear leading to isolation, high levels of stress  
Negative stereotyping  
Racism  
Denial of racism/segregation problem  
Need for more welcoming in the community

*'The white teachers don't like us.  
When a white kid does something good, they get praised.  
When we do something good, they say nothing.'*

##### **Issues more common in areas of concentrated poverty:**

Low incomes/joblessness leading to extralegal economic activity  
Poor parental supervision of children and lack of other supportive/responsible adults  
Lack of employed role models  
Individuals focused on day-to-day survival unlikely to make education a top priority  
Unwillingness or inability to take personal responsibility (e.g., in housing: use of illegal subleases and presence of unaccounted-for tenants)  
Lack of pride in surroundings  
High level of mobility leading to instability in family, education  
Inability to set and work toward goals  
Entitlement mentality promoted by welfare dependency  
Victim mentality promoted by discrimination and dependency

*Describing the problems of the inner city as a result of abstract 'racism' is not helpful  
because fighting 'racism' seems a futile exercise.*

## B. Potential solutions

*We decided early on that the issues of housing, education and jobs were not mutually exclusive, and that if we had to do anything, we had to do all of them . . . . One of the things we said is that if the economic bottom line drives the process, then a rising economic tide should diminish segregation. But does it?*

The potential solutions that appear here should be regarded as a valuable first cut. As the Community Circles Collaborative proceeds with its second round of discussions, every effort will be made to deepen participants' understanding of the connections among the issues and to help them develop meaningful and effective responses to those issues.

It is also important to remember that many potential solutions are implicit in the issue statements. For example, to address the issue described as "biases in business lending that shortchange women- and minority-owned businesses," a potential solution might be to work to eliminate those biases, or to find other ways to make more investment capital available to women and minorities. In this sense, the issues lists should not be dismissed as potential sources of ideas.

Again, as was the case with the issues, every attempt has been made to capture the essence of what emerged from the discussants, while also combining and clarifying ideas where appropriate.

*When something isn't working,  
try something new.*

### 1. *Employment and opportunity*

Suggestions for increasing employment and economic opportunity generally addressed broad topical categories, such as entrepreneurship and child care.

Adopt the OxFam approach that sets up micro-loan and revolving credit programs ("money circles") among groups of inner-city residents. This will help to foster entrepreneurship.

Increase funding for women- and minority-owned businesses.

Require basic benefits with all full-time jobs.

Offer incentives to lenders to make business and home loans to low-income persons.

Recruit corporations as community partners that can help to provide transportation to job sites, child care, and job offers to center-city residents.

Improve the transit system by expanding reverse-commute options and using a wider variety of vehicle and service types (e.g., company vans, vanpools, dial-a-ride systems, bus-service rerouting).

Expand the funding for and availability of adequate child care.

*We found ourselves going back and forth. First, someone would say, well, it's an economic solution we need here, or it's an economic cause of this problem. And then right away someone else would counter with, it's lack of community, it's 'heart' things. What we eventually came up with is that we have to have solutions that are addressed to both sides of the problem, because one or the other isn't going to do it.*

## 2. *Societal relations and resources*

Suggestions related to social relations focused on communities of faith and sources of information:

- Partner churches to offer and encourage multi-cultural experiences for their congregations.
- Provide anti-racism training and materials for media staff members.
- Work more through communities of faith and rely more on faith-based programs, which are [often] more successful than comparable secular programs.
- Keep public libraries open for longer hours, especially evenings and weekends.

*Congregations need to move  
'outside the congregational walls.'*

## 3. *Housing and neighborhoods*

The most logical breakdown of potential solutions in this category is between housing and neighborhoods.

### **Housing:**

- Mix small apartment buildings with other housing types in new developments.
- Allow mixed-use zoning that permits people to live, for example, above stores.
- Increase the flexibility of various codes to assist large families, for example by allowing three persons in each bedroom.
- Increase the number of duplexes and triplexes with resident owners.
- Fund experiments in shared living.
- Expand the supply of transitional housing.
- Experiment with ways to reduce the profit motive vis-a-vis construction and rehabilitation of affordable housing.
- Reinstitute some kind of fair-share housing requirement regionwide.
- Put teeth in the Livable Communities Act and the Community Reinvestment Act.
- Provide better and more consistent code enforcement.
- Increase resources to make landlords accountable for repairs and treatment of tenants.
- Offer more widespread down-payment assistance to persons of limited means.
- Couple household support programs with housing choice and subsidy.
- Test "money circles" as a source of funding for home improvements and other family/household needs.
- Experiment with payment-assistance programs, similar to existing utility-assistance programs (e.g., voluntary payments by utility customers to help those in need).

### **Neighborhoods:**

- Pair seniors and young parents so they can get to know one another and exchange services, for example swapping occasional child care for lawn mowing
- Expand and support Neighborhood Watch programs.
- Improve emergency support systems, as well as awareness of and access to them.

*People like to be with  
people like themselves.*

#### 4. Education

Ideas for improving public education ran the gamut from those promoting general improvement for all students, regardless of race or socioeconomic status, to those specifically targeting at-risk youngsters from a wide variety of backgrounds. These suggestions fell into several groupings: curriculum and teaching, student support, school choice, recognition of diversity and community relations.

*If we go back to neighborhood schools, poverty areas must have the best, strongest teachers.*

##### **Curriculum and teaching improvements:**

- Teach all students life skills, such as money management, parenting, how to look for a job and how to select appropriate housing.
- Eliminate state curriculum standards except for testing.
- Require academic tests at the elementary, middle-junior high and senior high school levels.
- Rate schools on academic achievement.
- Develop different learning tracks, including at least one that provides a good education to those who will not go to [an academic]college.
- Expand work-study opportunities that do not allow teen-agers to work in fast-food places -- for example, home construction/rehabilitation.
- Encourage/recruit corporate sponsorships and internships. Involve businesses in helping students better visualize careers and career paths and learn the skills they will need.
- Educate students for civic participation.
- Require community-service hours, even before high school.
- Equalize school-district spending per child.
- Lengthen both the school day and the school year.

*It is time to leave the premise that everyone is qualified to attend college. It is very important for our country to have mechanics, plumbers, carpenters and others who perform such useful tasks. Dignity is in all work and unfortunately that has been lost.*

##### **Student support:**

- Move away from a "fix the kid" approach to a "fix the system" approach.
- Enhance programs that prevent drop-outs.
- Offer more tutoring.
- Expand mentoring programs.
- Expand after-school activities, especially in the fine and performing arts and other non-athletic program areas.
- Get truants off the streets and into a community center, workplace or community-service setting.
- Require uniforms (although not necessarily "traditional" ones).
- Provide better and more plentiful counseling that is more holistic and incorporates help with chemical abuse.
- Sponsor "burning issues" clubs, lunches or other time to help youngsters deal with issues at home.

*Kids are afraid to go to school because of racism, they're afraid because of sexism, homophobia . . . When they're there, the children are so worried about, am I going to get to my next class, am I going to get home, am I going to get beat up on the way home, am I going to have my lunch money for lunch -- that learning is secondary.*

**School choice:**

Allow children to go to any [public] school they want.  
Support community schools -- "stop busing madness."  
"Bus for programs, not for numbers."

*Teachers in the public school system are very unprepared for kids of color. Training needs to address not only multiculturalism but it needs to address some of the factors of poverty and how they impact on kids. They need to look at learning styles. They need to look at how they as teachers can facilitate involvement by parents and community members.*

**Diversity:**

Fund learning opportunities that bring together or pair students from divergent backgrounds.  
Use instruction and programs focused on the environment and ecology to bring together all groups in the community in a common concern and in common enterprise.  
Train teachers in cultural competency.  
Imbue the curriculum with diversity, rather than making diversity a "special event" or giving it superficial treatment.  
Offer scholarships to students of color who agree to come back and teach for a minimum period of time.

**Community relations:**

Experiment with "peer parent" and buddy programs that help newcomers feel less isolated and become more involved in their children's schools.  
Strengthen the non-educational/pre-school support system that helps to relieve problems in the schools, which consists of programs like Head Start, parenting education, mentoring, quality child care and non-school recreation.  
Incorporate community facilities, such as community centers, social service centers and health-care facilities, within or adjacent to schools to give everyone a "stake" in the success of those schools.

*I remember when there were three black teachers in the Minneapolis public schools. And yet there were students of color that were going through that school system, combating racism as individuals, and going on to become successful participants in society. We can blame a lot of things on racism, but let's not fall into the trap of using that as an excuse for a lack of achievement.*

## IV. Preparing for the Future

*I think a lot of white people believe, but sometimes don't feel that we can say it, that racism is probably a relatively minor cause of the relatively poor performance of minority kids . . . . It would be incredibly naive to discount the impact of racism on minority kids in our schools, but it seems to me far more significant causes are the breakdown of the African-American family and the lack of role models for young kids. And the sports culture I think is even more important than racism, the idolization of athletes, and the belief that African-American boys in the Minneapolis public schools have -- something like 85 percent feel they can have careers in professional sports . . . . But we don't ever talk about any of those other issues.*

A deeper look at the output of the study circles offers mostly good news: An important and meaningful dialogue has begun, all across the Twin Cities, and people of good will from all backgrounds are thinking about economic and racial disparities with an intensity not seen since the 1960s. Most of the participants grasp the gravity of the issues, understand at least in part their nature and connections to one another, and the necessity for action rather than passive acceptance.

Moreover, the dialogue has begun by generating a profile of many of the important issues. The Study Circle Reports (Section III of this report) contain a wealth of information, insights and ideas that can be used to propel further exploration of the role of race, changing economics and spatial segregation on housing and education throughout the region.

Having said that, though, it is worth taking a more critical look at the study circle output, and at the process itself, as a means of preparing the ground for another round of conversations. This section of the report is divided into two parts; the first focuses on issues of substance, both present and future, and the second focuses on issues of process.

### A. Issues of Substance

One striking feature of the lists of issues is the virtually total absence of comments about gangs -- in spite of stories in the Minneapolis *Star-Tribune* and elsewhere relating gang activities to the recent upsurge in violent crime, particularly homicides. Perhaps more than any other event, the proliferation and expansion of gangs has contributed substantially to region-wide fears of violent crime. Although "violence in the schools" was mentioned, it was not connected to a broader recognition of the role of gangs in spreading fear in city neighborhoods and institutions.

Another minor shortcoming of the study-circles process is its failure to systematically explore causal connections. As a result, the study circles tended to produce, on the one hand, a litany of problems that is not prioritized, and, on the other hand, a litany of solutions that may be only haphazardly connected and responsive to the identified problems.

Nonetheless, several cause-and-effect relationships were noted by participants or by experts working with them. For example, one participant noted that solving problems of inequity would require a two-pronged attack: one directed at economics (for example, job training, adequate transportation and center-city investment) and the other directed at community (housing, public education and taxes). This approach recognizes that housing and educational segregation cannot be considered in a vacuum, but are affected by family incomes and community context. Similarly, the police chief of St. Louis Park noted that, based on the relatively high percentage of arrests that involve people of color, a great deal of racial "profiling" has taken place. Yet he was quick to add that the majority of such crimes are in fact crimes of *poverty*.

*Although the world has become a global village,  
whites are not ready to accept us even though we are equally qualified . . . .  
I think we should start a program where you interact  
with us and get to know us a little better . . . .  
Racism is alive.*

Unhappily, race and poverty too often go hand in hand in our society. As Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton said in their landmark book *American Apartheid*,

Most Americans vaguely realize that urban America is still a residentially segregated society, but few appreciate the depth of black segregation or the degree to which it is maintained by ongoing institutional arrangements and contemporary individual actions. . . . Residential segregation is not a neutral fact; it systematically undermines the social and economic well-being of blacks . . . [creating] a social environment where poverty and joblessness are the norm . . . (1993: 1-2).

Along the same lines, William Julius Wilson has said:

[T]he wage and employment gap between skilled and unskilled workers is growing partly because education and training are considered more important than ever in the new global economy. At the same time that changes in technology are producing new jobs, they are making many others obsolete. . . . More routine workers face the growing threat of job displacement. . . . The shift in demand has been especially devastating for those low-skilled workers whose incorporation into the mainstream economy has been marginal or recent. Even before the economic restructuring of the nation's economy, low-skilled African-Americans were at the end of the employment queue. Their economic situation has been further weakened because they tend to reside in communities that not only have higher jobless rates and lower employment growth but lack access to areas of higher employment and employment growth as well.

-- William Julius Wilson, *When Work Disappears*, 1996: 28-29

*We know that poverty isn't going anywhere, and racism isn't dead.*  
-- Vivian Jenkins Nelson, INTER-RACE

*A lot of times the white culture accepts this one particular way of looking at life, this very linear, Western type of norms and values, and they think that's reality . . . . Imagine they see a horse and a moose. They don't say, 'Oh, that's a moose,' they say, 'Oh, that's a bad horse.' We need to not have this invisible centering on the white and everybody else is 'other,' who is sort of a failed white.*

There may be more agreement on the pernicious effects of economic disparity than on those of race and discrimination. For example, one suburban group reported that "our circle cited 'institutional racism' as a myth created by many." This group did "not feel that race is a large issue. People are people, no matter what color or culture they are." One school worker remarked that "I don't see racism in the schools. I think there is a generous feeling of people trying. Maybe not always succeeding, but trying."

On the other hand, these remarks hint at what Curt Johnson calls the insidious nature of discrimination in Northern cities. At the "Beyond Busing" forum, he quoted from a letter received from an African-American friend upon his return to Houston after living in the Twin Cities for three years: "I left because of the racism . . . At least in the South, I could see the knife. In Minnesota, I didn't find the blood until I got home. It was so subtle, and I didn't realize until later and began to add it up . . . ."

Some connections between minority status, joblessness, educational opportunity and community decay do appear in the summaries of study-circle discussions. However, the fact that they are not clearly stated or explored suggests either (1) that few participants truly understand these relationships, or (2) that participants take them so for granted that they are no longer seen as salient.

This situation is further illustrated by two types of responses that, although not commonplace, view the region through ideological or unfocused lenses. One type essentially rejects all interventions intended to reduce segregation and income disparity: Since government has failed, everything associated with it should go. We should repeal taxes, end the prohibition on drugs, repeal labor laws and occupational licensing regulations, end the public-school monopoly, and rigidly separate business and state.

A second type of response takes the form of broad goal statements that move us no closer to real solutions:

- Limit growth and sprawl.
- Revitalize the urban core.
- Organize people at the grassroots level.
- Build partnerships among business, government and the community.
- Improve housing in the inner city.
- Develop a better public transportation system.

In a few cases, participants focused on "what we can do" without identifying the purpose in doing it -- for example, they said they would "meet with the mayor and the Board of Education," but did not say why.

In short, many of the findings of the study circles cover the surface of the issues but do not probe very deeply. Suggested solutions are uneven in character, time frame, comprehensiveness, relevance and practicality. Moreover, there was as much emphasis on problems that plague everyone, particularly in the realm of public education, as upon problems closely associated with racial and economic segregation.

However, none of this is unexpected in the first round of a citizen effort of this type. Although the effort to develop solutions in the last round of discussions was necessary to give participants a sense of achievement

and closure, it was premature in the sense that few people were ready intellectually and emotionally to propose truly innovative or meaningful solutions instead of reiterating "proven" ideas that may have little effect on the identified issues. This, too, is not unexpected: If housing desegregation were easy, it would have been achieved already.

### Guidelines for Future Circles

- A packet of short readings should be sent to all prospective participants. Some should re-emphasize regional problems, while others might highlight programs and initiatives being undertaken elsewhere in the country. This may be supplemented by a reading list for those who want to explore further.

Suggestions for this list:

Wilson, William Julius. 1987. *The Truly Disadvantaged*. One of the contemporary classics, this book links racial segregation and economic disadvantage in creative new ways. Wilson, almost single-handedly, reopened a debate that had been closed off for nearly twenty years.

Wilson, William Julius. 1996. *When Work Disappears*. Wilson's follow-up presents data, extracts from interviews with inner-city residents, and policy suggestions.

Massey, Douglas and Nancy Denton. 1993. *American Apartheid*. Another classic, this book takes issue with some of Wilson's conclusions and uses an impressive array of statistics to do so. An outstanding primer on the legacy of segregation.

Orfield, Myron. 1997. *Metropolitcs*. An alarming look at change in the Twin Cities region, which also gives a sense of what can be done at the state level to combat and channel that change.

Sapphire. 1996. *Push*. A first-person account of the life of an inner-city teenager; this book offers a realistic inside look at the challenges of growing up in urban America.

Downs, Anthony. 1973. *Opening Up the Suburbs*. Perhaps the seminal work in this series, it offers some ideas that are as fresh today as they were a generation ago.

Barnett, Jonathan. 1996. *The Fractured Metropolis*. An urban designer's look at what can be done to heal the fractures in our society.

American Planning Association. 1994. *Planning and Community Equity*. A collection of articles addressing the full range of equity issues: affordable housing, transportation, environmental degradation, social impacts, governance, capital investment and citizen participation.

- Focus discussions more tightly. The initial study questions were pretty broad and left a lot of room for interpretation without a lot of direction. Four or five more focused questions would help to structure the dialogue and produce more focused results as well. One question could be used for each study-circle meeting in the next series. Each question could look at a topical study area, perhaps in terms of specific linkages, e.g., economic opportunity and education, economic opportunity and community support (child care, transportation, etc.), affordable housing and desegregation/deconcentration, public schools and the community, race relations, etc. Each study circle could be given the option of choosing the questions it addresses from a more comprehensive list.

### B. Issues of Process

The study-circle process proved its value through not only the output of the discussions but the responses of most participants, who viewed it as a valuable experience they would like to continue or repeat. This occurred even though the process suffered from some initial organizational difficulties. Delays in getting the circles up and running, and in producing and finalizing participant materials, caused some frustration among coordinators, facilitators and participants alike. Scheduling meeting times seems to have been a

problem for nearly every circle. In spite of these circumstances, however, there seems to be a general sense that the process was worthwhile, and productive as well.

Creating meaningful change is more art than science. Most organizations that undertake such change fall short of their initial goals. This should not be viewed as "failure." Rather, it should be treated as an invaluable learning experience that could not be gained in any other way -- an experience that should energize and shape ongoing efforts.

Three specific process-related issues arose as a result of the first round of study circles. The first issue relates to group diversity, the second to group facilitation, and the third to group scheduling. These issues are addressed below.

*What you're doing is not a nice thing. . . .  
What you want people to say is not that it is a nice thing to do  
but that's an absolutely necessary thing to do.  
-- Martha McCoy, Study Circles Resource Center.*

### **Improving Diversity**

**Race and ethnicity:** The full group of participants (350+) was fairly representative of the Twin Cities community as a whole in terms of race/ethnicity. However, individual groups did not reflect this diversity. As a result, some participants perceived that the process was not representative. A number of comments were made regarding how "the right people aren't here."

Several methods of improving racial and ethnic diversity might be used. One would be to invite the participation of secular service clubs and congregations that are known to appeal to members of particular groups. Another would be to pair congregations and other sponsoring organizations to promote racial and ethnic intermingling. A third would involve deliberately assigning volunteers of one heritage to join a discussion group dominated by another. Because it is safe to presume that the vast majority of participants are persons of good will and intent, finding volunteers willing to cross barriers should not be difficult. (Besides, isn't that the whole point of this exercise -- crossing barriers?)

**Gender:** The group of participants as a whole was not well-balanced by gender. Men made up only about one-fourth of the participants. The all-female memberships of a couple of study circles even remarked on the absence of male counterparts and asked what could be done to "get the men here."

Although gender imbalance is not uncommon for a volunteer group of this type, gender imbalance needs to be addressed in the next round of circles. One possible approach would be to specifically invite participation by the men's groups from various sponsoring faith communities. Another would be to invite participation by business owners and managers, who -- for better or worse -- are still predominately male.

*It's important to get the advantaged to understand how they're affected  
by [the] plight of low-income minorities.*

## Improving Group Facilitation

Good facilitation is the key to good results. The reports from the circles, and the surveys completed by the facilitators themselves, suggest that the quality of facilitation was uneven. This is one of the potential pitfalls of using volunteers, but it need not be a fatal one.

EHEP could turn to professional facilitators to conduct the next round of meetings, but this is not necessary nor even particularly wise. What is needed is better training and support for volunteer facilitators. For example, at least one facilitator complained that the group he or she led frequently strayed from the topic -- without any apparent understanding that it is the job of the facilitator to keep the group focused and moving so it can produce the results it wants within the allotted time.

The facilitator training process and packet reflect this failure to teach the basics. Training emphasized the content of the sessions and cultural considerations -- both critical topics, to be sure, but not to the exclusion of learning how to lead a productive meeting, keep the group focused, mediate conflict, and handle difficult people ("difficult" here referring to any number of problems, including glibness, silence, stonewalling, attempts to dominate, etc.).

Given that some of the facilitators are relatively inexperienced, having a monitor present to step in and redirect the group's energy can be invaluable. A monitor can keep an eye on several groups at a time and keep tabs on the clock as well. The monitor's presence allows each facilitator to engage fully in the group's discussion and ensure that both substance and direction remain relevant. Moreover, should any facilitator encounter difficulty with a particular group -- belligerence, refusal to focus, etc. -- someone else is present to mediate and help the group get moving in positive ways again. The presence of a monitor can aid neophyte and experienced facilitators alike.

In CCC's case, the difficulties in using monitors are logistical: If each group is meeting at its own place and time, it is simply infeasible for a single monitor to be present. Neither would this be an efficient use of anyone's time. Moreover, the number of monitors available will necessarily be limited by the need for each one to be highly experienced in facilitation and/or team leadership. These difficulties could be overcome through a different approach to scheduling discussions.

## Improving Study-Circle Scheduling

Ironically, it is possible that individual groups were given *too much* latitude in scheduling their own meetings -- which means that each person's dentist appointment, TV viewing habits, softball league, family demands, vacation and other prior commitments interfered with circle meetings. Multiply this effect by ten or fifteen circle members, and it becomes clear why scheduling was a problem.

Rather than leaving the scheduling decision wide open, it may be more effective to set up group meeting times in advance. For example, meetings in each round of discussions could be slated to take place at one of four or five predetermined times at one of four or five predetermined locations. Discussants would be asked to select one of those times and places to participate, either for the entire series or on a meeting-by-meeting basis. Advance sign-ups would probably be necessary in order to make sure that all time slots have enough participants; otherwise, intended participants would have to be notified of a change in plans.

Although this approach might entail some additional work on the part of the organizers, it might also eliminate some work by eliminating confusion about who is meeting where, and when. Moreover,

sponsoring organizations would remain heavily involved in coordinating meetings and keeping track of participants.

Adopting an approach similar to this one could produce several benefits:

- It would impose some discipline on the groups and indicate that the study circles are not a social event that takes place only when everyone is free, but a formalized process with demands of its own.
- It would allow coordinators to balance the sizes of the circles, eliminating problems caused by poor attendance in some groups while others overflow.
- It would allow individuals who might miss one set time to “make up” a session at a different time, thus facilitating participation in the entire series of discussions.
- It would allow individuals to sample different locations, if desired, thus exposing them to a much wider range of viewpoints and ideas.
- It would enable the circle coordinators at any given location to balance racial and gender representation more effectively, either by pairing sponsoring organizations or by randomly assigning incoming individuals to different discussion groups.
- It would allow for the efficient use of monitors in support of facilitators.
- It would put everyone on essentially the same timetable, with a clear beginning and a clear end.

One potential drawback to this approach is that some groups would lose the continuity and, hence, the familiarity that foster trust and openness. However, the process itself can help to encourage such openness. Moreover, most discussion groups will probably remain essentially intact throughout the entire series due to individual choices.

## **V. Plans for the Future**

## **VI. Appendices**

- A. Background on EHEP, CCC
- B. Findings of facilitator questionnaire
- C. List of sponsors and participants

## I. Executive Summary: Principal Findings and Directions for the Future

## II. Background: The Community Study Circle Collaborative

*"It couldn't happen here." Not in Minneapolis-St. Paul, the political home of Hubert Humphrey: Minnesota, America's sane heartland. . . . The Twin Cities was immune to urban decline, inner-suburban decay, urban sprawl -- and the polarization that has devastated and divided older, larger regions. After all, we were not Chicago, Detroit, or Milwaukee. We were reform minded, and our philanthropic and governmental centers were coordinated and responsive. Then the 1980s hit, marking our Twin Cities with identical patterns of regional polarization. . . . If it could happen here, no American region is immune. Once polarization occurs, the concentration of poverty, disinvestment, middle-class flight, and urban sprawl grow more and more severe.*

*-- Myron Orfield, Metropolitics (1997: 1, emphasis added)*

State Legislator Myron Orfield was one of the first citizens in the region to realize that Twin Cities communities were becoming increasingly polarized along the lines of race and class. Changes in regional school districts pointed to serious issues of equity in both housing access and public education.

It is within this context that the Community Circle Collaborative (CCC) was launched. CCC is a metro-wide dialogue project that engages citizens from all walks of life, 5-15 at a time, in study circles held throughout the metro area. Originally a partnership among EHEP, the Minneapolis Initiative Against Racism (MIAR), the Minnesota Minority Education Partnership (MMEP), and the Minnesota Fair Housing Center, the CCC initiative has expanded into a wide-ranging coalition of community-based organizations, public staff and officials, and individuals working in a variety of fields, including social justice, race relations, housing, education, religion, law and social research.

CCC's study circles have been charged with discussing two central questions:

- What are the impacts of existing patterns of residential, economic and racial segregation on the educational achievement and life opportunities of Twin Cities area children and families?
- What can or should we do, as individuals and as a community, to enhance educational success and housing and economic opportunities for *all* children in the Twin Cities area?

These are the two critical questions facing the Twin Cities region as it moves toward the 21st Century.

*The diversity in our state is greatest among children. . . . So this is a long curve. We'd better start getting some of the answers right now, because they're going to affect an entire generation.* -- Vivian Jenkins Nelson, INTER-RACE

### A. What is a Community Study Circle?

The Community Circle Collaborative process is one way to sample the broadest possible spectrum of opinions within a community. It is also an effective way to generate informed conversations that can lead to new levels of citizenship and civic action. This process has been used all over the country to create a public voice about important issues and to help ensure that that voice is heard by decision-makers. Without the effort to bring people together for informed and civil conversation, the most extreme voices are free to frame the issues. Public-spirited conversation will be drowned out by shrill debate, our communities will become even more polarized, and our common interests and values will get lost in a sea of opposition and conflict. There is a need to create a public voice that recognizes our common interests and generates consensus about, or at least informed consent to, policies and actions designed to further the common good.

Why is this public conversation important? In part, it's because most of what we see today in the media and in public meetings is "positioning" or "posturing" -- that is, highly stylized communication. The purpose of this style is to advocate one point of view or another, at the expense of dialogue and, often, of decorum. Although widely accepted in the media, this type of communication ultimately leads to public cynicism and withdrawal from the political process. Not many people wish to become strident enough to compete in such a contrived forum. Community circles offer a refreshing change from the narrow and often restrictive discussions of the past and the competitive debates encouraged by the political process.

To "converse" means to "share words with others". It carries the implication of equality of opportunity and status, and of the give-and-take of exchange. Conversations, which shares ideas, thoughts and perspectives, are intended to lead to understanding. They help to clear the air by honestly reflecting the differences and similarities among the conversants.

The study circle is a well-tested, practical method for adult learning and social change. In a study circle, 5-20 people meet several times to discuss the various choices the community might make concerning a social or political issue. Complex issues are broken down into manageable pieces, and controversial topics are dealt with in depth. Each discussion lasts about two hours and is directed by a well-prepared discussion leader whose role is to aid in lively but focused discussion. The process is informal, democratic and highly participatory, so that the group can capitalize on the experience of all its members.

*People acting as citizens create new ways of working together and new ways of taking responsibility for what is publicly all of ours. -- Dick Little, Education and Housing Equity Project*

The community circles process recognizes that agreement is not necessary in order for a conversation to be successful. What *are* necessary are listening, reflecting, and speaking from both the head and the heart. Mutual respect and a belief in the enlightening and healing nature of sharing ideas -- across boundaries of ethnicity, geography, age, gender, socioeconomic status and even language -- can go a long way toward making a conversation rewarding for the community as well as the individuals involved. Moreover, they can become vehicles for community problem-solving and development of action coalitions, composed of individual citizens, community organizations, the business community and government, that are better able to effect meaningful change for the better.

In many cultures, circles are symbols of equality, fairness and completeness. The underlying premise of the Community Circles Collaborative process is that solutions to serious and often divisive issues can be found if we put aside our fears and prejudices and work together.

## **B. The Need: Residential and Educational Segregation in the Twin Cities**

The Education and Housing Equity Project (EHEP) was created in early 1995 by a group of education and housing advocates who shared a belief in the pressing need to link the issue of school desegregation with

the broader issue of housing and neighborhood segregation. EHEP's mission is to act as a catalyst to build broad-based coalitions and engage the community in public conversations about and advocacy for promotion of racially and economically inclusive communities that give families of all incomes, races and ethnic backgrounds access to schools and housing throughout the metropolitan area.

*The reason it's critical that we talk is because words have different meanings to different people, and we have different levels of interpretation and reflection from our own experience, our history, our expectations, our own knowledge of where we can go.*  
-- Dr. Josie Johnson

A few alarming facts highlight the nature and depth of the concerns they wished to address:

- The proportion of people of color who live in poverty is higher in Minneapolis/St. Paul than in any other central city in the nation: 37 percent of African-Americans, 40 percent of Native Americans, 32 percent of Latinos.
- Concentrations of poverty and income disparities between the region's central cities and its suburbs are also among the highest in the nation. The poverty rate in Minneapolis is 18.5 percent, in St. Paul 16.7 percent, but in the suburbs it is only 4.5 percent.
- The central cities are home to only 22 percent of the children enrolled in regional schools, but to 55 percent of the region's impoverished elementary school children.
- Between 1970 and 1984, the population of the metro area increased by 9.7 percent but the land it occupied increased by 25.1 percent.

### **C. Chronology of CCC Events**

The Community Circle Colaborative is now more than a year old. A brief chronology of its activities and related events appears below.

**December 1996:** The "Beyond Busing" Kick-Off Forum was held for project sponsors. This event was attended by more than 100 people representing a wide variety of organizations: churches, advocacy groups, academia, public agencies and foundations. Significantly, the event took place in the suburbs (in the St. Louis Park City Council chambers), making it clear from the beginning that this was not a central-city effort but a metro-wide effort. The first two speakers, former St. Paul Mayor George Latimer and education expert Josie Johnson, Ph.D., helped to set the context of the project and to encourage and motivate participants. The two speakers who followed them, Curt Johnson, chair of the Metropolitan Council; and Yusef Mgeni, President of the Urban Coalition, provided information and insights regarding the breadth and depth of segregation problems and costs in the metropolitan area. Following the speakers, individuals representing the state legislature, an outer-ring suburban church, an inner-ring suburban school, a nonprofit housing developer, the media and the Minneapolis Mayor's Office all described why they planned to participate in the project and urged others to join them. As the event concluded, many new sponsors submitted their pledges to participate by organizing study circles.

**February 1997:** Training for study-circle facilitators was held, and the first Discussion Guide for participants was issued.

**March-June 1997:** Study circle discussion groups met 3-5 times each to discuss the two questions given above. Each group produced a brief report summarizing its discussion and findings. Nearly 350 people

participated in these discussions.

**May 1997:** CCC held a Community Forum at Macalester College in St. Paul. This forum was attended by many of the individuals who had participated in study circles and gave them a chance not only to share the results of their deliberations and but also to explore the extent of commonalities among the different groups. The Forum featured Martha McCoy, the Executive Director of the (national) Study Circles Resource Center, whose presentation was followed by two "conversations." The first, moderated by Vivian Jenkins Nelsen, President and CEO of INTER-RACE, focused on the first study-circle question (regarding impacts); the second, moderated by George Latimer, addressed the second question, which focuses on potential solutions. (Section III of this report summarizes the findings of all the study circles.)

**June 1997:** The Institute on Race and Poverty delivers to the McKnight Foundation a report entitled "Examining the Relationship Between Housing, Education, and Persistent Segregation." This report identifies the Twin Cities region as one of the ten most segregated metropolitan regions in the United States.

*The Twin Cities have reached an important time to consider which path it will follow. This community has already begun to creep down the path so familiar to many large urban areas. If the Twin Cities community is to reverse its course, it must begin now. This community must seriously examine and confront what is happening here, and it must come together for real, proven solutions. -- The Institute on Race and Poverty, University of Minnesota*

**July 1997:** All study circle reports were submitted to EHEP. In addition, facilitators and group organizers completed a questionnaire intended to help the study-circle organizers to learn more about the process -- successes as well as difficulties -- and to glean suggestions concerning how better to proceed in the next round of discussions.

**July-October 1997:** Individual participants who represented interested groups made presentations to their respective organizations, local communities and constituencies.

**September 1997:** The National Conference on Race Relations and America's Public Education System takes place. One of the discussion sites is the Twin Cities. Among the practical issues identified are housing segregation, economic inequity, and the need for long-term solutions rather than quick fixes.

**April 1998:** The final report of the first round of study circles, "Beyond Busing: The First Metrowide Dialogue on the Challenges of Education and Housing Segregation," is issued.

### III. Study Circle Reports

#### A. Issues

*We are in very deep denial. We believe we aren't like Detroit, but we are;  
it's just happening more slowly here.*

The necessary first step in trying to solve thorny social problems is to ensure that those problems are understood in much the same way by all. The Community Circles Collaborative therefore focused its study groups' initial attention on issue identification and discussion.

The issues identified by CCC participants fell into four fairly distinct groupings:

- Issues related to regional growth and equity in terms of investment, employment and social relations;
- Systemic issues related to housing segregation and neighborhood quality;
- Systemic issues related to education; and
- Issues that arise primarily at the level of the individual.

A small degree of liberty has been taken to clarify meaning or to combine similar thoughts expressed in different ways by more than one participant or study circle. Every effort has been made, however, to retain the essence of what appeared in the study circle reports.

Issues shown in italic type were identified by more than one study group.

#### 1. *Issues of regional growth and equity*

When asked to determine how many societies the Twin Cities have become, people responded in two different ways. One group suggested that we have become "three societies: The very rich, working people, and the poor." Another described it differently: "Two -- those who work and those who don't." Regardless of how it is said, though, there was a strong recognition among participants that the region has become polarized into distinct, and often mutually distrusting, camps.

The issues that appear in this grouping deal with the broad context of regional equity -- and inequity. They cluster around three topics: investment, employment and social relations.

##### **Investment:**

Spatial mismatch between available fiscal and economic resources and high-order fiscal and social needs -- for example, northern part of region needs more infrastructure

Biases in business lending that shortchange women- and minority-owned businesses

Need for more entrepreneurship programs, e.g., micro-loans, money circles

*Perceived and real disadvantages of central-city sites, due to crime, presence of pollutants and an unskilled workforce*

*A focus on the short-term and the bottom line, disregarding long-standing evidence that a "rising tide" does not lift all boats*

Shortage of businesses that are committed to being good corporate citizens

Growth containment affects provision and cost of infrastructure

*Suburbanites like to have the benefits of the city  
but do not like to pay for them.*

**Employment:**

*Spatial mismatch between available jobs and many of the unemployed -- e.g., the northern part of the region needs to provide more jobs*  
Biases in job hiring and wage-setting practices  
Shortage of reverse-commute options that can take inner-city workers to suburban jobs  
*Shortage of quality affordable child care, especially at "non-traditional" work times*  
Changing workforce demographics: more persons of color, more seniors, more women supporting households  
Challenge presented by people who are physically or psychologically unable to "work a 9-5 job"  
Underrecognition by business that well-trained employees lead to greater profitability  
*Lack of benefits with many part-time and low-wage jobs*  
Jobs accessible to residents of poor communities often go to outsiders  
Lack of sufficient interest in and support for entrepreneurship in minority and poor communities

**Social relations:**

*Distortions and stereotypes in media reporting*  
*Reporting of crime that is disproportionate to its occurrence*  
Need for true justice that is timely, fair and makes wise use of parole and community-service options  
Polarization reinforced by racial categories on government forms  
General breakdown of family structure and cohesion due to economic demands, lifestyle choices, decline in community support  
Perceived need to keep track of people with criminal records (e.g., community right-to-know regulations for known sex offenders)  
Tendency for people to remain close to their support networks  
*Decline in traditional values, especially a decline in personal integrity and responsibility*  
Lack of courage to make wise but unpopular decisions

*Churches can perpetuate values  
but are not always good role models*

**2. Systemic issues related to housing and neighborhoods**

There was a generally high level of consensus on housing and neighborhood issues, which clustered around two topics: housing stock and neighborhood environment. By far the most often-cited issue was that of exclusionary suburban zoning and development practices, which were mentioned specifically by one-fourth of the reporting groups.

*The people who can afford to pay taxes live out in the suburbs,  
and the inner city has been getting poorer and poorer. It will continue  
until there is some massive political determination  
that we're going to make our inner cities the most attractive places to live,  
or at least as attractive for all kinds of people as the suburbs are.*

**Housing:**

- Lack of investment in poor or declining neighborhoods
- Poor housing stock that repels stable families, discourages investment
- Lead-based paint and other health hazards
- Lack of neighborhood diversity in housing types, which leads to homogeneous populations
- Inflexible central-city zoning and other regulations that prohibit use of many vacant/abandoned buildings as shelter*
- Shortage of affordable housing*
- Punitive rental property taxes
- High cost of land
- Poor enforcement of existing fair housing laws
- Lack of awareness of opportunities and options among low-income households

*In Minneapolis, the government is sponsoring the destruction of affordable housing, through zoning, through licensing, through housing codes. The city has destroyed countless affordable neighborhoods.*

**Neighborhood environment:**

- Unequal power in neighborhood/community relations*
- Inadequate resources for general maintenance, including trash pick-up and yardwork
- Lack of resources to facilitate neighborhood involvement
- Transience caused by poor housing stock, low incomes*
- Land-use plans that give highest priority to accommodating cars (e.g., intrusive highway routes)
- Inadequate transit service (frequency, hours, direct routing and choice of destinations)*
- Exclusionary suburban zoning regulations (e.g., minimum lot size and square footage, garage requirements, development fees)*
- Redlining (insurance, lending, cab service, police response)*
- Crime and perceptions of crime*
- Need to improve conditions for those who “remain behind”

*More affluent neighborhoods [have] essentially accepted socioeconomic redlining.*

**3. Systemic issues related to education**

Perspectives on the shortcomings of the educational system were quite diverse but fall into two groupings: One focuses on the in-school experience, the other on the interaction between the school and the surrounding community.

**The school as educational institution:**

- Teachers not living in the community

- Few opportunities to experience diversity
- Institutional discrimination: students receiving differential treatment due to race/color, learning ability, economic status, perceived intelligence, and/or athletic ability, which can lead to artificially raised or lowered expectations
- Focus on short-term results when long-term solutions are needed
- Failure to teach the basics
- Lack of adequate [curriculum] structure
- Classes that are too big
- Inability to sustain children's enthusiasm for school beyond 3rd or 4th grade
- Too few minority teachers
- Insufficient counselors and inadequate counseling
- Schools being asked to do far more than teach academics
- Lack of effective means of dealing with children from problem situations; at-risk children "falling through the cracks"

*Where we do get the minorities to move out into the suburbs, they have the money, they have the wherewithal, but we . . . have a problem in the sensitivity of our teachers and our educational system . . . One of the biggest problems that [minority kids] are finding is that their teachers are prejudiced. So we move out into the suburbs, and what we encounter are teachers who will not be fair with these kids . . . They're also scared of being in school, because they're afraid of being called names, and if there's a fight, they get kicked out. So there's a racial imbalance.*

**The school in the community:**

- The school system is not user-friendly or parent-friendly
- Transience disrupting children's stability, ability to learn
- School violence (e.g., children carrying weapons)
- Unequal distribution of school resources, both within and between school districts
- Perception that central-city schools are underfunded
- Special challenges presented by schools impacted by concentrated poverty
- Lack of adequate transportation/transit, which results in reduced access to extra-curricular activities and school choice
- The public-school monopoly -- lack of competition and choice
- Poor nutrition among school children
- Language barriers among recent immigrants
- Under-educated, over-worked parents who cannot adequately help their children
- [Household] stability affects academic achievement
- Need for transitional housing to support schools

*You can't learn  
if you are hungry.*

**4. Issues related to individuals**

These issues reflect more general concerns about the state of our society as a whole as well as the plight of individuals within it. Some of these issues are pandemic -- that is, they plague people in all races, classes and locations; others are more specific to particular circumstances, especially the circumstances of those living in areas of concentrated poverty.

**Society-wide issues:**

- Substance abuse and addiction*
- Breakdown in the institution of marriage
- Lack of recognition for different family types, e.g., extended families
- Lack of self-esteem in children due to inadequate parenting
- Lack of respect for the rights, beliefs and property of others*
- Lack of respect for teachers and other elders*
- Fear leading to isolation, high levels of stress
- Negative stereotyping
- Racism
- Denial of racism/segregation problem
- Need for more welcoming in the community

*'The white teachers don't like us.  
When a white kid does something good, they get praised.  
When we do something good, they say nothing.'*

**Issues more common in areas of concentrated poverty:**

- Low incomes/joblessness leading to extralegal economic activity
- Poor parental supervision of children and lack of other supportive/responsible adults
- Lack of employed role models
- Individuals focused on day-to-day survival unlikely to make education a top priority
- Unwillingness or inability to take personal responsibility (e.g., in housing: use of illegal subleases and presence of unaccounted-for tenants)
- Lack of pride in surroundings
- High level of mobility leading to instability in family, education
- Inability to set and work toward goals
- Entitlement mentality promoted by welfare dependency
- Victim mentality promoted by discrimination and dependency

*Describing the problems of the inner city as a result of abstract 'racism' is not helpful  
because fighting 'racism' seems a futile exercise.*

**B. Potential solutions**

*We decided early on that the issues of housing, education and jobs were not mutually exclusive, and that if we had to do anything, we had to do all of them . . . . One of the things we said is that if the economic bottom line drives the process, then a rising economic tide should diminish segregation. But does it?*

The potential solutions that appear here should be regarded as a valuable first cut. As the Community Circles Collaborative proceeds with its second round of discussions, every effort will be made to deepen participants' understanding of the connections among the issues and to help them develop meaningful and effective responses to those issues.

It is also important to remember that many potential solutions are implicit in the issue statements. For example, to address the issue described as “biases in business lending that shortchange women- and minority-owned businesses,” a potential solution might be to work to eliminate those biases, or to find other ways to make more investment capital available to women and minorities. In this sense, the issues lists should not be dismissed as potential sources of ideas.

Again, as was the case with the issues, every attempt has been made to capture the essence of what emerged from the discussants, while also combining and clarifying ideas where appropriate.

*When something isn't working,  
try something new.*

### **1. Employment and opportunity**

Suggestions for increasing employment and economic opportunity generally addressed broad topical categories, such as entrepreneurship and child care.

- Adopt the OxFam approach that sets up micro-loan and revolving credit programs (“money circles”) among groups of inner-city residents. This will help to foster entrepreneurship.
- Increase funding for women- and minority-owned businesses.
- Require basic benefits with all full-time jobs.
- Offer incentives to lenders to make business and home loans to low-income persons.
- Recruit corporations as community partners that can help to provide transportation to job sites, child care, and job offers to center-city residents.
- Improve the transit system by expanding reverse-commute options and using a wider variety of vehicle and service types (e.g., company vans, vanpools, dial-a-ride systems, bus-service rerouting).
- Expand the funding for and availability of adequate child care.

*We found ourselves going back and forth. First, someone would say, well, it's an economic solution we need here, or it's an economic cause of this problem. And then right away someone else would counter with, it's lack of community, it's 'heart' things. What we eventually came up with is that we have to have solutions that are addressed to both sides of the problem, because one or the other isn't going to do it.*

### **2. Societal relations and resources**

Suggestions related to social relations focused on communities of faith and sources of information:

- Partner churches to offer and encourage multi-cultural experiences for their congregations.
- Provide anti-racism training and materials for media staff members.
- Work more through communities of faith and rely more on faith-based programs, which are [often] more successful than comparable secular programs.
- Keep public libraries open for longer hours, especially evenings and weekends.

*Congregations need to move  
'outside the congregational walls.'*

### **3. Housing and neighborhoods**

The most logical breakdown of potential solutions in this category is between housing and neighborhoods.

**Housing:**

- Mix small apartment buildings with other housing types in new developments.
- Allow mixed-use zoning that permits people to live, for example, above stores.
- Increase the flexibility of various codes to assist large families, for example by allowing three persons in each bedroom.
- Increase the number of duplexes and triplexes with resident owners.
- Fund experiments in shared living.
- Expand the supply of transitional housing.
- Experiment with ways to reduce the profit motive vis-a-vis construction and rehabilitation of affordable housing.
- Reinstitute some kind of fair-share housing requirement regionwide.
- Put teeth in the Livable Communities Act and the Community Reinvestment Act.
- Provide better and more consistent code enforcement.
- Increase resources to make landlords accountable for repairs and treatment of tenants.
- Offer more widespread down-payment assistance to persons of limited means.
- Couple household support programs with housing choice and subsidy.
- Test "money circles" as a source of funding for home improvements and other family/household needs.
- Experiment with payment-assistance programs, similar to existing utility-assistance programs (e.g., voluntary payments by utility customers to help those in need).

**Neighborhoods:**

- Pair seniors and young parents so they can get to know one another and exchange services, for example swapping occasional child care for lawn mowing
- Expand and support Neighborhood Watch programs.
- Improve emergency support systems, as well as awareness of and access to them.

*People like to be with people like themselves.*

**4. Education**

Ideas for improving public education ran the gamut from those promoting general improvement for all students, regardless of race or socioeconomic status, to those specifically targeting at-risk youngsters from a wide variety of backgrounds. These suggestions fell into several groupings: curriculum and teaching, student support, school choice, recognition of diversity and community relations.

*If we go back to neighborhood schools, poverty areas must have the best, strongest teachers.*

**Curriculum and teaching improvements:**

- Teach all students life skills, such as money management, parenting, how to look for a job and how to select appropriate housing.
- Eliminate state curriculum standards except for testing.

Require academic tests at the elementary, middle-junior high and senior high school levels.  
Rate schools on academic achievement.  
Develop different learning tracks, including at least one that provides a good education to those who will not go to [an academic]college.  
Expand work-study opportunities that do not allow teen-agers to work in fast-food places -- for example, home construction/rehabilitation.  
Encourage/recruit corporate sponsorships and internships. Involve businesses in helping students better visualize careers and career paths and learn the skills they will need.  
Educate students for civic participation.  
Require community-service hours, even before high school.  
Equalize school-district spending per child.  
Lengthen both the school day and the school year.

*It is time to leave the premise that everyone is qualified to attend college. It is very important for our country to have mechanics, plumbers, carpenters and others who perform such useful tasks. Dignity is in all work and unfortunately that has been lost.*

**Student support:**

Move away from a "fix the kid" approach to a "fix the system" approach.  
Enhance programs that prevent drop-outs.  
Offer more tutoring.  
Expand mentoring programs.  
Expand after-school activities, especially in the fine and performing arts and other non-athletic program areas.  
Get truants off the streets and into a community center, workplace or community-service setting.  
Require uniforms (although not necessarily "traditional" ones).  
Provide better and more plentiful counseling that is more holistic and incorporates help with chemical abuse.  
Sponsor "burning issues" clubs, lunches or other time to help youngsters deal with issues at home.

*Kids are afraid to go to school because of racism, they're afraid because of sexism, homophobia . . . When they're there, the children are so worried about, am I going to get to my next class, am I going to get home, am I going to get beat up on the way home, am I going to have my lunch money for lunch -- that learning is secondary.*

**School choice:**

Allow children to go to any [public] school they want.  
Support community schools -- "stop busing madness."  
"Bus for programs, not for numbers."

*Teachers in the public school system are very unprepared for kids of color. Training needs to address not only multiculturalism but it needs to address some of the factors of poverty and how they impact on kids. They need to look at learning styles. They need to look at how they as teachers can facilitate involvement by parents*

*and community members.*

**Diversity:**

Fund learning opportunities that bring together or pair students from divergent backgrounds.  
Use instruction and programs focused on the environment and ecology to bring together all groups

in the community in a common concern and in common enterprise.

Train teachers in cultural competency.

Imbue the curriculum with diversity, rather than making diversity a “special event” or giving it superficial treatment.

Offer scholarships to students of color who agree to come back and teach for a minimum period of time.

**Community relations:**

Experiment with “peer parent” and buddy programs that help newcomers feel less isolated and become more involved in their children’s schools.

Strengthen the non-educational/pre-school support system that helps to relieve problems in the schools, which consists of programs like Head Start, parenting education, mentoring, quality child care and non-school recreation.

Incorporate community facilities, such as community centers, social service centers and health-care facilities, within or adjacent to schools to give everyone a “stake” in the success of those schools.

*I remember when there were three black teachers in the Minneapolis public schools.  
And yet there were students of color that were going through that school system,  
combating racism as individuals, and going on to become successful participants in society.  
We can blame a lot of things on racism, but let's not fall into the trap of using that  
as an excuse for a lack of achievement.*

## IV. Preparing for the Future

*I think a lot of white people believe, but sometimes don't feel that we can say it, that racism is probably a relatively minor cause of the relatively poor performance of minority kids . . . . It would be incredibly naive to discount the impact of racism on minority kids in our schools, but it seems to me far more significant causes are the breakdown of the African-American family and the lack of role models for young kids. And the sports culture I think is even more important than racism, the idolization of athletes, and the belief that African-American boys in the Minneapolis public schools have -- something like 85 percent feel they can have careers in professional sports . . . . But we don't ever talk about any of those other issues.*

A deeper look at the output of the study circles offers mostly good news: An important and meaningful dialogue has begun, all across the Twin Cities, and people of good will from all backgrounds are thinking about economic and racial disparities with an intensity not seen since the 1960s. Most of the participants grasp the gravity of the issues, understand at least in part their nature and connections to one another, and the necessity for action rather than passive acceptance.

Moreover, the dialogue has begun by generating a profile of many of the important issues. The Study Circle Reports (Section III of this report) contain a wealth of information, insights and ideas that can be used to propel further exploration of the role of race, changing economics and spatial segregation on housing and education throughout the region.

Having said that, though, it is worth taking a more critical look at the study circle output, and at the process itself, as a means of preparing the ground for another round of conversations. This section of the report is divided into two parts; the first focuses on issues of substance, both present and future, and the second focuses on issues of process.

### A. Issues of Substance

One striking feature of the lists of issues is the virtually total absence of comments about gangs -- in spite of stories in the Minneapolis *Star-Tribune* and elsewhere relating gang activities to the recent upsurge in violent crime, particularly homicides. Perhaps more than any other event, the proliferation and expansion of gangs has contributed substantially to region-wide fears of violent crime. Although "violence in the schools" was mentioned, it was not connected to a broader recognition of the role of gangs in spreading fear in city neighborhoods and institutions.

Another minor shortcoming of the study-circles process is its failure to systematically explore causal connections. As a result, the study circles tended to produce, on the one hand, a litany of problems that is not prioritized, and, on the other hand, a litany of solutions that may be only haphazardly connected and responsive to the identified problems.

Nonetheless, several cause-and-effect relationships were noted by participants or by experts working with them. For example, one participant noted that solving problems of inequity would require a two-pronged attack: one directed at economics (for example, job training, adequate transportation and center-city investment) and the other directed at community (housing, public education and taxes). This approach recognizes that housing and educational segregation cannot be considered in a vacuum, but are affected by family incomes and community context. Similarly, the police chief of St. Louis Park noted that, based on the relatively high percentage of arrests that involve people of color, a great deal of racial "profiling" has taken place. Yet he was quick to add that the majority of such crimes are in fact crimes of *poverty*.

*Although the world has become a global village,  
whites are not ready to accept us even though we are equally qualified . . . .  
I think we should start a program where you interact  
with us and get to know us a little better . . . .  
Racism is alive.*

Unhappily, race and poverty too often go hand in hand in our society. As Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton said in their landmark book *American Apartheid*,

Most Americans vaguely realize that urban America is still a residentially segregated society, but few appreciate the depth of black segregation or the degree to which it is maintained by ongoing institutional arrangements and contemporary individual actions. . . . Residential segregation is not a neutral fact; it systematically undermines the social and economic well-being of blacks . . . [creating] a social environment where poverty and joblessness are the norm . . . (1993: 1-2).

Along the same lines, William Julius Wilson has said:

[T]he wage and employment gap between skilled and unskilled workers is growing partly because education and training are considered more important than ever in the new global economy. At the same time that changes in technology are producing new jobs, they are making many others obsolete. . . . More routine workers face the growing threat of job displacement. . . . The shift in demand has been especially devastating for those low-skilled workers whose incorporation into the mainstream economy has been marginal or recent. Even before the economic restructuring of the nation's economy, low-skilled African-Americans were at the end of the employment queue. Their economic situation has been further weakened because they tend to reside in communities that not only have higher jobless rates and lower employment growth but lack access to areas of higher employment and employment growth as well.

-- William Julius Wilson, *When Work Disappears*, 1996: 28-29

*We know that poverty isn't going anywhere, and racism isn't dead.*  
-- Vivian Jenkins Nelson, INTER-RACE

*A lot of times the white culture accepts this one particular way of looking at life, this very linear, Western type of norms and values, and they think that's reality . . . . Imagine they see a horse and a moose. They don't say, 'Oh, that's a moose,' they say, 'Oh, that's a bad horse.' We need to not have this invisible centering on the white and everybody else is 'other,' who is sort of a failed white.*

There may be more agreement on the pernicious effects of economic disparity than on those of race and

discrimination. For example, one suburban group reported that "our circle cited 'institutional racism' as a myth created by many." This group did "not feel that race is a large issue. People are people, no matter what color or culture they are." One school worker remarked that "I don't see racism in the schools. I think there is a generous feeling of people trying. Maybe not always succeeding, but trying."

On the other hand, these remarks hint at what Curt Johnson calls the insidious nature of discrimination in Northern cities. At the "Beyond Busing" forum, he quoted from a letter received from an African-American friend upon his return to Houston after living in the Twin Cities for three years: "I left because of the racism . . . At least in the South, I could see the knife. In Minnesota, I didn't find the blood until I got home. It was so subtle, and I didn't realize until later and began to add it up . . ."

Some connections between minority status, joblessness, educational opportunity and community decay do appear in the summaries of study-circle discussions. However, the fact that they are not clearly stated or explored suggests either (1) that few participants truly understand these relationships, or (2) that participants take them so for granted that they are no longer seen as salient.

This situation is further illustrated by two types of responses that, although not commonplace, view the region through ideological or unfocused lenses. One type essentially rejects all interventions intended to reduce segregation and income disparity: Since government has failed, everything associated with it should go. We should repeal taxes, end the prohibition on drugs, repeal labor laws and occupational licensing regulations, end the public-school monopoly, and rigidly separate business and state.

A second type of response takes the form of broad goal statements that move us no closer to real solutions:

- Limit growth and sprawl.
- Revitalize the urban core.
- Organize people at the grassroots level.
- Build partnerships among business, government and the community.
- Improve housing in the inner city.
- Develop a better public transportation system.

In a few cases, participants focused on "what we can do" without identifying the purpose in doing it -- for example, they said they would "meet with the mayor and the Board of Education," but did not say why.

In short, many of the findings of the study circles cover the surface of the issues but do not probe very deeply. Suggested solutions are uneven in character, time frame, comprehensiveness, relevance and practicality. Moreover, there was as much emphasis on problems that plague everyone, particularly in the realm of public education, as upon problems closely associated with racial and economic segregation.

However, none of this is unexpected in the first round of a citizen effort of this type. Although the effort to develop solutions in the last round of discussions was necessary to give participants a sense of achievement and closure, it was premature in the sense that few people were ready intellectually and emotionally to propose truly innovative or meaningful solutions instead of reiterating "proven" ideas that may have little effect on the identified issues. This, too, is not unexpected: If housing desegregation were easy, it would have been achieved already.

### **Guidelines for Future Circles**

- A packet of short readings should be sent to all prospective participants. Some should re-emphasize regional problems, while others might highlight programs and initiatives being undertaken elsewhere in the country. This may be supplemented by a reading list for those who want to explore further.

Suggestions for this list:

Wilson, William Julius. 1987. *The Truly Disadvantaged*. One of the contemporary classics, this book links racial segregation and economic disadvantage in creative new ways. Wilson, almost single-handedly, reopened a debate that had been closed off for nearly twenty years.

Wilson, William Julius. 1996. *When Work Disappears*. Wilson's follow-up presents data, extracts from interviews with inner-city residents, and policy suggestions.

Massey, Douglas and Nancy Denton. 1993. *American Apartheid*. Another classic, this book takes issue with some of Wilson's conclusions and uses an impressive array of statistics to do so. An outstanding primer on the legacy of segregation.

Orfield, Myron. 1997. *Metropolitics*. An alarming look at change in the Twin Cities region, which also

gives a sense of what can be done at the state level to combat and channel that change.

Sapphire. 1996. *Push*. A first-person account of the life of an inner-city teenager; this book offers a realistic inside look at the challenges of growing up in urban America.

Downs, Anthony. 1973. *Opening Up the Suburbs*. Perhaps the seminal work in this series, it offers some ideas that are as fresh today as they were a generation ago.

Barnett, Jonathan. 1996. *The Fractured Metropolis*. An urban designer's look at what can be done to heal the fractures in our society.

American Planning Association. 1994. *Planning and Community Equity*. A collection of articles addressing the full range of equity issues: affordable housing, transportation, environmental degradation, social impacts, governance, capital investment and citizen participation.

- Focus discussions more tightly. The initial study questions were pretty broad and left a lot of room for interpretation without a lot of direction. Four or five more focused questions would help to structure the dialogue and produce more focused results as well. One question could be used for each study-circle meeting in the next series. Each question could look at a topical study area, perhaps in terms of specific linkages, e.g., economic opportunity and education, economic opportunity and community support (child care, transportation, etc.), affordable housing and desegregation/ deconcentration, public schools and the community, race relations, etc. Each study circle could be given the option of choosing the questions it addresses from a more comprehensive list.

## B. Issues of Process

The study-circle process proved its value through not only the output of the discussions but the responses of most participants, who viewed it as a valuable experience they would like to continue or repeat. This occurred even though the process suffered from some initial organizational difficulties. Delays in getting the circles up and running, and in producing and finalizing participant materials, caused some frustration among coordinators, facilitators and participants alike. Scheduling meeting times seems to have been a problem for nearly every circle. In spite of these circumstances, however, there seems to be a general sense that the process was worthwhile, and productive as well.

Creating meaningful change is more art than science. Most organizations that undertake such change fall short of their initial goals. This should not be viewed as "failure." Rather, it should be treated as an invaluable learning experience that could not be gained in any other way -- an experience that should energize and shape ongoing efforts.

Three specific process-related issues arose as a result of the first round of study circles. The first issue relates to group diversity, the second to group facilitation, and the third to group scheduling. These issues are addressed below.

*What you're doing is not a nice thing. . . .  
What you want people to say is not that it is a nice thing to do  
but that's an absolutely necessary thing to do.  
-- Martha McCoy, Study Circles Resource Center.*

### **Improving Diversity**

**Race and ethnicity:** The full group of participants (350+) was fairly representative of the Twin Cities community as a whole in terms of race/ethnicity. However, individual groups did not reflect this diversity. As a result, some participants perceived that the process was not representative. A number of comments were made regarding how "the right people aren't here."

Several methods of improving racial and ethnic diversity might be used. One would be to invite the participation of secular service clubs and congregations that are known to appeal to members of particular groups. Another would be to pair congregations and other sponsoring organizations to promote racial and ethnic intermingling. A third would involve deliberately assigning volunteers of one heritage to join a discussion group dominated by another. Because it is safe to presume that the vast majority of participants are persons of good will and intent, finding volunteers willing to cross barriers should not be difficult. (Besides, isn't that the whole point of this exercise -- crossing barriers?)

**Gender:** The group of participants as a whole was not well-balanced by gender. Men made up only about one-fourth of the participants. The all-female memberships of a couple of study circles even remarked on the absence of male counterparts and asked what could be done to "get the men here."

Although gender imbalance is not uncommon for a volunteer group of this type, gender imbalance needs to be addressed in the next round of circles. One possible approach would be to specifically invite participation by the men's groups from various sponsoring faith communities. Another would be to invite participation by business owners and managers, who -- for better or worse -- are still predominately male.

*It's important to get the advantaged to understand how they're affected  
by [the] plight of low-income minorities.*

### **Improving Group Facilitation**

Good facilitation is the key to good results. The reports from the circles, and the surveys completed by the facilitators themselves, suggest that the quality of facilitation was uneven. This is one of the potential pitfalls of using volunteers, but it need not be a fatal one.

EHEP could turn to professional facilitators to conduct the next round of meetings, but this is not necessary nor even particularly wise. What is needed is better training and support for volunteer facilitators. For example, at least one facilitator complained that the group he or she led frequently strayed from the topic -- without any apparent understanding that it is the job of the facilitator to keep the group focused and moving so it can produce the results it wants within the allotted time.

The facilitator training process and packet reflect this failure to teach the basics. Training emphasized the content of the sessions and cultural considerations -- both critical topics, to be sure, but not to the

exclusion of learning how to lead a productive meeting, keep the group focused, mediate conflict, and handle difficult people (“difficult” here referring to any number of problems, including glibness, silence, stonewalling, attempts to dominate, etc.).

Given that some of the facilitators are relatively inexperienced, having a monitor present to step in and redirect the group’s energy can be invaluable. A monitor can keep an eye on several groups at a time and keep tabs on the clock as well. The monitor’s presence allows each facilitator to engage fully in the group’s discussion and ensure that both substance and direction remain relevant. Moreover, should any facilitator encounter difficulty with a particular group -- belligerence, refusal to focus, etc. -- someone else is present to mediate and help the group get moving in positive ways again. The presence of a monitor can aid neophyte and experienced facilitators alike.

In CCC’s case, the difficulties in using monitors are logistical: If each group is meeting at its own place and time, it is simply infeasible for a single monitor to be present. Neither would this be an efficient use of anyone’s time. Moreover, the number of monitors available will necessarily be limited by the need for each one to be highly experienced in facilitation and/or team leadership. These difficulties could be overcome through a different approach to scheduling discussions.

### **Improving Study-Circle Scheduling**

Ironically, it is possible that individual groups were given *too much* latitude in scheduling their own meetings -- which means that each person’s dentist appointment, TV viewing habits, softball league, family demands, vacation and other prior commitments interfered with circle meetings. Multiply this effect by ten or fifteen circle members, and it becomes clear why scheduling was a problem.

Rather than leaving the scheduling decision wide open, it may be more effective to set up group meeting times in advance. For example, meetings in each round of discussions could be slated to take place at one of four or five predetermined times at one of four or five predetermined locations. Discussants would be asked to select one of those times and places to participate, either for the entire series or on a meeting-by-meeting basis. Advance sign-ups would probably be necessary in order to make sure that all time slots have enough participants; otherwise, intended participants would have to be notified of a change in plans.

Although this approach might entail some additional work on the part of the organizers, it might also eliminate some work by eliminating confusion about who is meeting where, and when. Moreover, sponsoring organizations would remain heavily involved in coordinating meetings and keeping track of participants.

Adopting an approach similar to this one could produce several benefits:

- It would impose some discipline on the groups and indicate that the study circles are not a social event that takes place only when everyone is free, but a formalized process with demands of its own.
- It would allow coordinators to balance the sizes of the circles, eliminating problems caused by poor attendance in some groups while others overflow.
- It would allow individuals who might miss one set time to “make up” a session at a different time, thus facilitating participation in the entire series of discussions.
- It would allow individuals to sample different locations, if desired, thus exposing them to a much wider range of viewpoints and ideas.
- It would enable the circle coordinators at any given location to balance racial and gender representation more effectively, either by pairing sponsoring organizations or by randomly assigning incoming individuals to different discussion groups.
- It would allow for the efficient use of monitors in support of facilitators.

- It would put everyone on essentially the same timetable, with a clear beginning and a clear end.

One potential drawback to this approach is that some groups would lose the continuity and, hence, the familiarity that foster trust and openness. However, the process itself can help to encourage such openness. Moreover, most discussion groups will probably remain essentially intact throughout the entire series due to individual choices.

## **V. Plans for the Future**

## **VI. Appendices**

- A. Background on EHEP, CCC
- B. Findings of facilitator questionnaire
- C. List of sponsors and participants

## **The Choices for Community Project A Report on the First Round of Community Circles**

“We need to develop a regional civics that is not about governmental entities. It’s about citizens, community groups, businesses, and government agencies coming together to act in the common interest of the region.”

– William Barnes, coauthor of *The U.S. Common Market*

### **I. Executive Summary: Principal Findings and Directions for the Future**

A great experiment in democracy is underway in Minneapolis/St. Paul. Since December 1996, over 350 residents of the Twin Cities metropolitan area have been involved in the Choices for Community program, the first effort of its kind to bring citizens of an entire *region* together to deliberate on difficult regional issues. The program is being organized by the Community Circle Collaborative, a cross-sector coalition of over 30 Twin Cities organizations.

In their Community Circles – small, participatory, democratic discussions – citizens addressed issues surrounding educational and residential segregation. Participants shared their hopes, concerns, and recommendations at a Community Forum held in May 1997.

This fall, another round of Community Circles will begin. The program’s organizers and sponsoring organizations are determined to bring many more people into these vital discussions. Based on findings from the first round, the program will also facilitate more opportunities for participants to join in implementing the solutions they develop. With the foundation laid in the first year, the second will become a greater springboard for action at the neighborhood and community levels.

## II. Background: The Community Circle Collaborative

*"It couldn't happen here." Not in Minneapolis-St. Paul, the political home of Hubert Humphrey: Minnesota, America's sane heartland. . . . The Twin Cities was immune to urban decline, inner-suburban decay, urban sprawl – and the polarization that has devastated and divided older, larger regions. After all, we were not Chicago, Detroit, or Milwaukee. We were reform minded, and our philanthropic and governmental centers were coordinated and responsive. Then the 1980s hit, marking our Twin Cities with identical patterns of regional polarization. . . . If it could happen here, no American region is immune. Once polarization occurs, the concentration of poverty, disinvestment, middle-class flight, and urban sprawl grow more and more severe.*

*-- Myron Orfield, Metropolitics (1997: 1, emphasis added)*

State Legislator Myron Orfield was one of the first citizens in the region to realize that Twin Cities communities were becoming increasingly polarized along the lines of race and class. Changes in regional school districts pointed to serious issues of equity in both housing access and public education.

It is within this context that the Community Circle Collaborative (CCC) was launched. CCC is a metro-wide dialogue project that engages citizens from all walks of life, 8-12 at a time, in study circles held throughout the metro area. Originally a partnership among EHEP, the Minneapolis Initiative Against Racism (MIAR), the Minnesota Minority Education Partnership (MMEP), and the Minnesota Fair Housing Center, the CCC initiative has expanded into a wide-ranging coalition of community-based organizations, public staff and officials, and individuals working in a variety of fields, including social justice, race relations, housing, education, religion, law and social research.

The Collaborative's members were united by their interest in two central questions:

- What are the impacts of existing patterns of residential, economic and racial segregation on the educational achievement and life opportunities of Twin Cities area children and families?
- What can or should we do, as individuals and as a community, to enhance educational success and housing and economic opportunities for *all* children in the Twin Cities area?

*The diversity in our state is greatest among children . . . . So this is a long curve. We'd better start getting some of the answers right now, because they're going to affect an entire generation.*

*-- Vivian Jenkins Nelsen, INTER-RACE*

### A. What is a Community Circle?

The Community Circle process is one way help a community achieve new levels of citizenship and civic action. Large-scale Choices for Community programs – often referred to as study circle programs – have been used all over the country to generate reasoned dialogue, decisive policy input, and grass-roots problem-solving.

The impacts of these programs range from new friendships, to neighborhood projects, to city-wide action plans, to new legislation. An evaluation of a study circle program in Greater Cleveland showed basic

changes in attitude as a result of the study circles. Study circle participants in Lima, Ohio have done everything from building new playgrounds to changing the makeup of a regional development board. A state-wide study circle program in Oklahoma helped the state legislature enact sweeping changes in the criminal system.

Community circles, or study circles, are democratic, highly participatory discussion groups which meet several times to address a critical public issue. The discussions are facilitated, and they follow a framework laid out in a discussion guide specific to that issue. The participants talk about how the issue affects them, then consider some of the larger questions surrounding the issue, and, finally, discuss how they might take action on the issue. Successful organizers have been able to mobilize large numbers of citizens – a “community-wide” program in a medium-sized city can involve roughly 1,000 people in 75-100 circles.

While community-wide study circle programs have taken place in many cities and towns, and state-wide study circle programs have taken place in Maine and Oklahoma, the Twin Cities Community Circles project is the first attempt at a region-wide program. With the ascendance of regional issues such as segregation, urban sprawl, and transportation to the forefront of policy debates across the nation, a region-wide model is a much-needed innovation.

*We face our greatest challenges at the neighborhood, regional, and global levels. Our governments are structured to address challenges at the local, state, and national levels.*  
– William Dodge, *Regional Excellence*

Why are these public conversations so unusual? In part, it’s because most of what we see today in the media and in public meetings is “positioning” or “posturing.” The purpose of this style is to advocate one point of view or another, at the expense of dialogue and, often, of decorum. Although widely accepted in the media, this type of communication ultimately leads to public cynicism and withdrawal from the political process. Not many people want to compete in such a contrived forum. Community circles offer a refreshing change from the narrow and often restrictive discussions of the past and the competitive debates encouraged by the political process.

*People acting as citizens create new ways of working together and new ways of taking responsibility for what is publicly all of ours.*  
– Dick Little, Education and Housing Equity Project

The community circles process recognizes that agreement is not necessary in order for a conversation to be successful. It is necessary for participants to listen, reflect, and speak from both the head and the heart. Mutual respect and a belief in the enlightening and healing nature of sharing ideas – across boundaries of ethnicity, geography, age, gender, socioeconomic status and even language – can go a long way toward making a conversation rewarding for the community as well as the individuals involved.

In many cultures, circles are symbols of equality, fairness and completeness. The underlying premise of the Community Circles Collaborative process is that solutions to serious and often divisive issues can be found if we put aside our fears and prejudices and work together.

## **B. The Need: Residential and Educational Segregation in the Twin Cities**

The Education and Housing Equity Project (EHEP), the [lead?] partner in the Community Circle Collaborative, was created in early 1995 by a group of education and housing advocates who shared a belief in the pressing need to link the issue of school desegregation with the broader issue of housing and neighborhood segregation. EHEP's mission is to act as a catalyst to build broad-based coalitions and engage the community in public conversations about and advocacy for promotion of racially and economically inclusive communities that give families of all incomes, races and ethnic backgrounds access to schools and housing throughout the metropolitan area.

*The reason it's critical that we talk is because words have different meanings to different people, and we have different levels of interpretation and reflection from our own experience, our history, our expectations, our own knowledge of where we can go.*

– Dr. Josie Johnson

A few alarming facts highlight the nature and depth of the concerns they wished to address:

- The proportion of people of color who live in poverty is higher in Minneapolis/St. Paul than in any other central city in the nation: 37 percent of African-Americans, 40 percent of Native Americans, 32 percent of Latinos.
- Concentrations of poverty and income disparities between the region's central cities and its suburbs are also among the highest in the nation. The poverty rate in Minneapolis is 18.5 percent, in St. Paul 16.7 percent, but in the suburbs it is only 4.5 percent.
- The central cities are home to only 22 percent of the children enrolled in regional schools, but to 55 percent of the region's impoverished elementary school children.
- Between 1970 and 1984, the population of the metro area increased by 9.7 percent but the land it occupied increased by 25.1 percent.

The organizations which have joined the Community Circle Collaborative may have widely-diverging views about how to solve these problems. However, all of the partners share a common concern about the issue of segregation, and a commitment that residents of the Twin Cities region must be actively engaged in addressing it.

*We know that poverty isn't going anywhere, and racism isn't dead.*

– Vivian Jenkins Nelsen, INTER-RACE

### **C. Chronology of CCC Events**

The Community Circle Collaborative is now more than a year old. A brief chronology of its activities and related events appears below.

**December 1996:** The "Beyond Busing" Kick-Off Forum was held for project sponsors. This event was attended by more than 100 people representing a wide variety of organizations: churches, advocacy groups, academia, public agencies and foundations. Significantly, the event took place in the suburbs (in the St. Louis Park City Council chambers), making it clear from the beginning that this was not a central-city effort but a metro-wide effort. The first two speakers, former St. Paul Mayor George Latimer and

education expert Josie Johnson, Ph.D., helped to set the context of the project and to encourage and motivate participants. The two speakers who followed them, Curt Johnson, chair of the Metropolitan Council; and Yusef Mgeni, President of the Urban Coalition, provided information and insights regarding the breadth and depth of segregation problems and costs in the metropolitan area. Following the speakers, individuals representing the state legislature, an outer-ring suburban church, an inner-ring suburban school, a nonprofit housing developer, the media and the Minneapolis Mayor's Office all described why they planned to participate in the project and urged others to join them. As the event concluded, many new sponsors submitted their pledges to participate by organizing study circles.

**February 1997:** Training for study-circle facilitators was held, and the first Discussion Guide for participants was issued.

**March-June 1997:** Study circle discussion groups met 3-5 times each to discuss the two questions given above. Each group produced a brief report summarizing its discussion and findings. Nearly 350 people participated in these discussions.

**May 1997:** CCC held a Community Forum at Macalester College in St. Paul. This forum was attended by many of the individuals who had participated in study circles and gave them a chance not only to share the results of their deliberations and but also to explore the extent of commonalities among the different groups. The Forum featured Martha McCoy, the Executive Director of the (national) Study Circles Resource Center, whose presentation was followed by two "conversations." The first, moderated by Vivian Jenkins Nelsen, President and CEO of INTER-RACE, focused on the first study-circle question (regarding impacts); the second, moderated by George Latimer, addressed the second question, which focuses on potential solutions. (Section III of this report summarizes the findings of all the study circles.)

**June 1997:** The Institute on Race and Poverty delivers to the McKnight Foundation a report entitled "Examining the Relationship Between Housing, Education, and Persistent Segregation." This report identifies the Twin Cities region as one of the ten most segregated metropolitan regions in the United States.

*The Twin Cities have reached an important time to consider which path it will follow. This community has already begun to creep down the path so familiar to many large urban areas. If the Twin Cities community is to reverse its course, it must begin now. This community must seriously examine and confront what is happening here, and it must come together for real, proven solutions.*

– The Institute on Race and Poverty, University of Minnesota

**July 1997:** All study circle reports were submitted to EHEP. In addition, facilitators and group organizers completed a questionnaire intended to help the study-circle organizers to learn more about the process – successes as well as difficulties – and to glean suggestions concerning how better to proceed in the next round of discussions.

**July-October 1997:** Individual participants who represented interested groups made presentations to their respective organizations, local communities and constituencies.

**September 1997:** The National Conference on Race Relations and America's Public Education System takes place. One of the discussion sites is the Twin Cities. Among the practical issues identified are

housing segregation, economic inequity, and the need for long-term solutions rather than quick fixes.

*April 1998:* The final report of the first round of study circles, "Beyond Busing: The First Metrowide Dialogue on the Challenges of Education and Housing Segregation," is issued.

### III. Study Circle Reports

#### A. Issues

*We are in very deep denial. We believe we aren't like Detroit, but we are;  
it's just happening more slowly here.*

– a community circle participant

The necessary first step in trying to solve thorny social problems is to ensure that those problems are understood in much the same way by all. Therefore, the Community Circles focused their attention first on identifying the issues.

The problem areas identified by CCC participants fell into four fairly distinct groupings:

- Issues related to regional growth and equity in terms of investment, employment and social relations;
- Systemic issues related to housing segregation and neighborhood quality;
- Systemic issues related to education; and
- Issues that arise primarily at the level of the individual.

A small degree of liberty has been taken to clarify meaning or to combine similar thoughts expressed in different ways by more than one participant or study circle. Every effort has been made, however, to retain the essence of what appeared in the study circle reports.

Issues shown in italic type were identified by more than one study group.

#### *I. Issues of regional growth and equity*

When asked to determine how many societies the Twin Cities have become, people responded in two different ways. One group suggested that we have become “three societies: The very rich, working people, and the poor.” Another described it differently: “Two – those who work and those who don’t.” Regardless of how it is said, though, there was a strong recognition among participants that the region has become polarized into distinct, and often mutually distrusting, camps.

The issues that appear in this grouping deal with the broad context of regional equity – and inequity. They cluster around three topics: investment, employment and social relations.

##### **Investment:**

Spatial mismatch between available fiscal and economic resources and high-order fiscal and social needs – for example, northern part of region needs more infrastructure

Biases in business lending that shortchange women- and minority-owned businesses

Need for more entrepreneurship programs, e.g., micro-loans, money circles

*Perceived and real disadvantages of central-city sites, due to crime, presence of pollutants and an unskilled workforce*

*A focus on the short-term and the bottom line, disregarding long-standing evidence that a “rising tide” does not lift all boats*

Shortage of businesses that are committed to being good corporate citizens

Growth containment affects provision and cost of infrastructure

*Suburbanites like to have the benefits of the city but do not like to pay for them.*

– a community circle participant

**Employment:**

*Spatial mismatch between available jobs and many of the unemployed – e.g., the northern part of the region needs to provide more jobs*

*Biases in job hiring and wage-setting practices*

*Shortage of reverse-commute options that can take inner-city workers to suburban jobs*

*Shortage of quality affordable child care, especially at “non-traditional” work times*

*Changing workforce demographics: more persons of color, more seniors, more women supporting households*

*Challenge presented by people who are physically or psychologically unable to “work a 9-5 job”*

*Under-recognition by business that well-trained employees lead to greater profitability*

*Lack of benefits with many part-time and low-wage jobs*

*Jobs accessible to residents of poor communities often go to outsiders*

*Lack of sufficient interest in and support for entrepreneurship in minority and poor communities*

**Social relations:**

*Distortions and stereotypes in media reporting*

*Reporting of crime that is disproportionate to its occurrence*

*Need for true justice that is timely, fair and makes wise use of parole and community-service options*

*Polarization reinforced by racial categories on government forms*

*General breakdown of family structure and cohesion due to economic demands, lifestyle choices, decline in community support*

*Perceived need to keep track of people with criminal records (e.g., community right-to-know regulations for known sex offenders)*

*Tendency for people to remain close to their support networks*

*Decline in traditional values, especially a decline in personal integrity and responsibility*

*Lack of courage to make wise but unpopular decisions*

*Churches can perpetuate values but are not always good role models.*

– a community circle participant

**2. Systemic issues related to housing and neighborhoods**

There was a generally high level of consensus on housing and neighborhood issues, which clustered around two topics: housing stock and neighborhood environment. By far the most often-cited issue was that of exclusionary suburban zoning and development practices, which were mentioned specifically by one-fourth of the reporting groups.

*The people who can afford to pay taxes live out in the suburbs, and the inner city has been getting poorer and poorer. It will continue until there is some massive political determination*

*that we're going to make our inner cities the most attractive places to live,  
or at least as attractive for all kinds of people as the suburbs are.*

– a community circle participant

**Housing:**

Lack of investment in poor or declining neighborhoods  
Poor housing stock that repels stable families, discourages investment  
Lead-based paint and other health hazards  
Lack of neighborhood diversity in housing types, which leads to homogeneous populations  
*Inflexible central-city zoning and other regulations that prohibit use of many vacant/  
abandoned buildings as shelter*  
*Shortage of affordable housing*  
Punitive rental property taxes  
High cost of land  
Poor enforcement of existing fair housing laws  
Lack of awareness of opportunities and options among low-income households

*In Minneapolis, the government is sponsoring the destruction of affordable housing,  
through zoning, through licensing, through housing codes. The city has destroyed  
countless affordable neighborhoods.*

– a community circle participant

**Neighborhood environment:**

*Unequal power in neighborhood/community relations*  
Inadequate resources for general maintenance, including trash pick-up and yardwork  
Lack of resources to facilitate neighborhood involvement  
*Transience caused by poor housing stock, low incomes*  
Land-use plans that give highest priority to accommodating cars (e.g., intrusive highway routes)  
*Inadequate transit service (frequency, hours, direct routing and choice of destinations)*  
*Exclusionary suburban zoning regulations (e.g., minimum lot size and square footage,  
garage requirements, development fees)*  
*Redlining (insurance, lending, cab service, police response)*  
*Crime and perceptions of crime*  
Need to improve conditions for those who “remain behind”

*More affluent neighborhoods [have] essentially accepted socioeconomic redlining.*

– a community circle participant

**3. Systemic issues related to education**

Perspectives on the shortcomings of the educational system were quite diverse but fall into two groupings: One focuses on the in-school experience, the other on the interaction between the school and the surrounding community.

**The school as educational institution:**

Teachers not living in the community

- Few opportunities to experience diversity
- Institutional discrimination: students receiving differential treatment due to race/color, learning ability, economic status, perceived intelligence, and/or athletic ability, which can lead to artificially raised or lowered expectations
- Focus on short-term results when long-term solutions are needed
- Failure to teach the basics
- Lack of adequate [curriculum] structure
- Classes that are too big
- Inability to sustain children's enthusiasm for school beyond 3rd or 4th grade
- Too few minority teachers
- Insufficient counselors and inadequate counseling
- Schools being asked to do far more than teach academics
- Lack of effective means of dealing with children from problem situations; at-risk children "falling through the cracks"

*Where we do get the minorities to move out into the suburbs, they have the money, they have the wherewithal, but we . . . have a problem in the sensitivity of our teachers and our educational system . . . One of the biggest problems that [minority kids] are finding is that their teachers are prejudiced. So we move out into the suburbs, and what we encounter are teachers who will not be fair with these kids . . . They're also scared of being in school, because they're afraid of being called names, and if there's a fight, they get kicked out. So there's a racial imbalance.*

– a community circle participant

**The school in the community:**

- The school system is not user-friendly or parent-friendly
- Transience disrupting children's stability, ability to learn
- School violence (e.g., children carrying weapons)
- Unequal distribution of school resources, both within and between school districts
- Perception that central-city schools are underfunded
- Special challenges presented by schools impacted by concentrated poverty
- Lack of adequate transportation/transit, which results in reduced access to extra-curricular activities and school choice
- The public-school monopoly – lack of competition and choice
- Poor nutrition among school children
- Language barriers among recent immigrants
- Under-educated, over-worked parents who cannot adequately help their children
- [Household] stability affects academic achievement
- Need for transitional housing to support schools

*You can't learn if you are hungry.*

– a community circle participant

**4. Issues related to individuals**

These issues reflect more general concerns about the state of our society as a whole as well as the plight of individuals within it. Some of these issues are pandemic – that is, they plague people in all races,

classes and locations; others are more specific to particular circumstances, especially the circumstances of those living in areas of concentrated poverty.

**Society-wide issues:**

- Substance abuse and addiction*
- Breakdown in the institution of marriage
- Lack of recognition for different family types, e.g., extended families
- Lack of self-esteem in children due to inadequate parenting
- Lack of respect for the rights, beliefs and property of others*
- Lack of respect for teachers and other elders*
- Fear leading to isolation, high levels of stress
- Negative stereotyping
- Racism
- Denial of racism/segregation problem
- Need for more welcoming in the community

*The white teachers don't like us.  
When a white kid does something good, they get praised.  
When we do something good, they say nothing.*

– a community circle participant

**Issues more common in areas of concentrated poverty:**

- Low incomes/joblessness leading to extralegal economic activity
- Poor parental supervision of children and lack of other supportive/responsible adults
- Lack of employed role models
- Individuals focused on day-to-day survival unlikely to make education a top priority
- Unwillingness or inability to take personal responsibility (e.g., in housing: use of illegal subleases and presence of unaccounted-for tenants)
- Lack of pride in surroundings
- High level of mobility leading to instability in family, education
- Inability to set and work toward goals
- Entitlement mentality promoted by welfare dependency
- Victim mentality promoted by discrimination and dependency

*Describing the problems of the inner city as a result of abstract 'racism' is not helpful  
because fighting 'racism' seems a futile exercise.*

– a community circle participant

**B. Potential solutions**

*We decided early on that the issues of housing, education and jobs were not mutually exclusive, and that if we had to do anything, we had to do all of them . . . One of the things we said is that if the economic bottom line drives the process, then a rising economic tide should diminish segregation. But does it?*

– a community circle participant

The potential solutions that appear here should be regarded as a valuable first cut. As the Community Circles Collaborative proceeds with its second round of discussions, new efforts will be made to help them develop meaningful and effective responses to those issues.

It is also important to remember that many potential solutions are implicit in the issue statements. For example, to address the issue described as “biases in business lending that shortchange women- and minority-owned businesses,” a potential solution might be to work to eliminate those biases, or to find other ways to make more investment capital available to women and minorities.

Again, as was the case with the issues, every attempt has been made to capture the essence of what emerged from the discussants, while also combining and clarifying ideas where appropriate.

*When something isn't working, try something new.*

– a community circle participant

### ***1. Employment and opportunity***

Suggestions for increasing employment and economic opportunity generally addressed broad topical categories, such as entrepreneurship and child care.

Adopt the OxFam approach that sets up micro-loan and revolving credit programs (“money circles”) among groups of inner-city residents. This will help to foster entrepreneurship.

Increase funding for women- and minority-owned businesses.

Require basic benefits with all full-time jobs.

Offer incentives to lenders to make business and home loans to low-income persons.

Recruit corporations as community partners that can help to provide transportation to job sites, child care, and job offers to center-city residents.

Improve the transit system by expanding reverse-commute options and using a wider variety of vehicle and service types (e.g., company vans, vanpools, dial-a-ride systems, bus-service rerouting).

Expand the funding for and availability of adequate child care.

*We found ourselves going back and forth. First, someone would say, well, it's an economic solution we need here, or it's an economic cause of this problem. And then right away someone else would counter with, it's lack of community, it's 'heart' things. What we eventually came up with is that we have to have solutions that are addressed to both sides of the problem, because one or the other isn't going to do it.*

– a community circle participant

### ***2. Societal relations and resources***

Suggestions related to social relations focused on communities of faith and sources of information:

Partner churches to offer and encourage multi-cultural experiences for their congregations.

Provide anti-racism training and materials for media staff members.

Work more through communities of faith and rely more on faith-based programs, which are [often] more successful than comparable secular programs.

Keep public libraries open for longer hours, especially evenings and weekends.

*Congregations need to move 'outside the congregational walls.'*

– a community circle participant

### 3. *Housing and neighborhoods*

The most logical breakdown of potential solutions in this category is between housing and neighborhoods.

#### **Housing:**

- Mix small apartment buildings with other housing types in new developments.
- Allow mixed-use zoning that permits people to live, for example, above stores.
- Increase the flexibility of various codes to assist large families, for example by allowing three persons in each bedroom.
- Increase the number of duplexes and triplexes with resident owners.
- Fund experiments in shared living.
- Expand the supply of transitional housing.
- Experiment with ways to reduce the profit motive vis-a-vis construction and rehabilitation of affordable housing.
- Reinstitute some kind of fair-share housing requirement regionwide.
- Put teeth in the Livable Communities Act and the Community Reinvestment Act.
- Provide better and more consistent code enforcement.
- Increase resources to make landlords accountable for repairs and treatment of tenants.
- Offer more widespread down-payment assistance to persons of limited means.
- Couple household support programs with housing choice and subsidy.
- Test “money circles” as a source of funding for home improvements and other family/household needs.
- Experiment with payment-assistance programs, similar to existing utility-assistance programs (e.g., voluntary payments by utility customers to help those in need).

#### **Neighborhoods:**

- Pair seniors and young parents so they can get to know one another and exchange services, for example swapping occasional child care for lawn mowing
- Expand and support Neighborhood Watch programs.
- Improve emergency support systems, as well as awareness of and access to them.

*People like to be with people like themselves.*

– a community circle participant

### 4. *Education*

Ideas for improving public education ran the gamut from those promoting general improvement for all students, regardless of race or socioeconomic status, to those specifically targeting at-risk youngsters from a wide variety of backgrounds. These suggestions fell into several groupings: curriculum and teaching, student support, school choice, recognition of diversity and community relations.

*If we go back to neighborhood schools, poverty areas must have  
the best, strongest teachers.*

– a community circle participant

**Curriculum and teaching improvements:**

- Teach all students life skills, such as money management, parenting, how to look for a job and how to select appropriate housing.
- Eliminate state curriculum standards except for testing.
- Require academic tests at the elementary, middle-junior high and senior high school levels.
- Rate schools on academic achievement.
- Develop different learning tracks, including at least one that provides a good education to those who will not go to [an academic]college.
- Expand work-study opportunities that do not allow teen-agers to work in fast-food places – for example, home construction/rehabilitation.
- Encourage/recruit corporate sponsorships and internships. Involve businesses in helping students better visualize careers and career paths and learn the skills they will need.
- Educate students for civic participation.
- Require community-service hours, even before high school.
- Equalize school-district spending per child.
- Lengthen both the school day and the school year.

*It is time to leave the premise that everyone is qualified to attend college.  
It is very important for our country to have mechanics, plumbers, carpenters  
and others who perform such useful tasks. Dignity is in all work  
and unfortunately that has been lost.*

– a community circle participant

**Student support:**

- Move away from a “fix the kid” approach to a “fix the system” approach.
- Enhance programs that prevent drop-outs.
- Offer more tutoring.
- Expand mentoring programs.
- Expand after-school activities, especially in the fine and performing arts and other non-athletic program areas.
- Get truants off the streets and into a community center, workplace or community-service setting.
- Require uniforms (although not necessarily “traditional” ones).
- Provide better and more plentiful counseling that is more holistic and incorporates help with chemical abuse.
- Sponsor “burning issues” clubs, lunches or other time to help youngsters deal with issues at home.

*Kids are afraid to go to school because of racism, they're afraid because of sexism,  
homophobia . . . When they're there, the children are so worried about, am I going to  
get to my next class, am I going to get home, am I going to get beat up on the way home,  
am I going to have my lunch money for lunch – that learning is secondary.*

– a community circle participant

**School choice:**

Allow children to go to any [public] school they want.  
Support community schools – “stop busing madness.”  
“Bus for programs, not for numbers.”

*Teachers in the public school system are very unprepared for kids of color.  
Training needs to address not only multiculturalism but it needs to address some of  
the factors of poverty and how they impact on kids. They need to look at learning styles.  
They need to look at how they as teachers can facilitate involvement by parents  
and community members.*

– a community circle participant

**Diversity:**

Fund learning opportunities that bring together or pair students from divergent backgrounds.  
Use instruction and programs focused on the environment and ecology to bring together all  
groups in the community in a common concern and in common enterprise.  
Train teachers in cultural competency.  
Imbue the curriculum with diversity, rather than making diversity a “special event” or giving it  
superficial treatment.  
Offer scholarships to students of color who agree to come back and teach for a minimum period  
of time.

**Community relations:**

Experiment with “peer parent” and buddy programs that help newcomers feel less isolated and  
become more involved in their children’s schools.  
Strengthen the non-educational/pre-school support system that helps to relieve problems in the  
schools, which consists of programs like Head Start, parenting education, mentoring, quality  
child care and non-school recreation.  
Incorporate community facilities, such as community centers, social service centers and health-  
care facilities, within or adjacent to schools to give everyone a “stake” in the success of  
those schools.

*I remember when there were three black teachers in the Minneapolis public schools.  
And yet there were students of color that were going through that school system,  
combating racism as individuals, and going on to become successful participants in society.  
We can blame a lot of things on racism, but let’s not fall into the trap of using that  
as an excuse for a lack of achievement.*

– a community circle participant

## IV. Preparing for the Future

*I think a lot of white people believe, but sometimes don't feel that we can say it, that racism is probably a relatively minor cause of the relatively poor performance of minority kids . . . . It would be incredibly naive to discount the impact of racism on minority kids in our schools, but it seems to me far more significant causes are the breakdown of the African-American family and the lack of role models for young kids. And the sports culture I think is even more important than racism, the idolization of athletes, and the belief that African-American boys in the Minneapolis public schools have – something like 85 percent feel they can have careers in professional sports . . . . But we don't ever talk about any of those other issues.*

– a community circle participant

An important and meaningful dialogue has begun, all across the Twin Cities, and people of good will from all backgrounds are thinking about economic and racial disparities with great intensity.

The community circles generated a profile of many of the important issues. The Community Circle Reports (Section III of this report) contain a wealth of information, insights and ideas that can be used to propel further exploration of the role of race, changing economics and spatial segregation of housing and education throughout the region. They also developed a long and varied list of action ideas.

The community circle process also proved its value through the responses of most participants, who viewed it as a valuable experience they would like to continue or repeat.

There were, however, some weaknesses in the first round of community circles, including a lower level of action outcomes than in similar programs in other communities. This section of the report provides some analysis of the program and recommendations for the second round of community circles.

### **Recommendation #1: Strengthen the action component**

As is evident in Section III of this report, community circle participants talked a great deal about action. They developed long lists of action ideas, in the areas of employment and opportunity, societal relations and resources, housing and neighborhoods, and education. Unfortunately, it appears that few of those participants went on to try to implement any of the action ideas. It is also unclear whether the views of participants had any effect on public policy decisions. This runs counter to what could be expected based on the results of study circle programs in other communities.

#### **A. Improve the final session of the guide**

The final session of the *Choices for Community* guide, which was used in all the community circles, led participants through a process of listing the areas of tension or conflict and the areas of agreement that they had come to in their discussions. The volunteer recorder in each group was then asked to summarize these thoughts on a record that was submitted to the Community Circle Collaborative.

In study circle guides produced by the Study Circles Resource Center, the final session includes a range of action ideas, divided into categories according to what individuals can do, what small groups can do, what institutions can do, and what communities as a whole can do. Those action lists reflect a range of

political viewpoints and are meant simply to assist the study circle in its brainstorming about what action ideas fit best in their community.

The final session of the revised *Choices for Community* guide should include such a list, as well as discussion questions that help participants prioritize those ideas and think about what roles they can play on the neighborhood, community, and regional level.

### **B. Improve the recording process**

Good records from each community circle can be a valuable asset for structuring an action forum, preparing a report that condenses the deliberations, and giving policy input to public officials.

The records submitted from the community circles varied widely in their length, focus, and level of detail. A certain amount of unevenness is to be expected, but more consistency and uniformity would have been extremely helpful. The new *Choices for Community* guide should include simple forms built into each session, giving each recorder specific guidance in how they report the findings of the group.

For the next round, the facilitators should be asked to lead their groups through a summarizing process at the end of each session. This brings the wisdom of the whole group to bear in the recording process, and ensures that the records capture the ideas of the group and the spirit of collaboration.

### **C. Hold a true action forum**

In May 1997, a forum was held for the participants in the first round of community circles. Due to scheduling constraints, that forum occurred before all of the groups had finished their four sessions of deliberation. More importantly, the forum was not structured as an action forum; rather, it was intended to create a large-group deliberation on segregation issues. While some attendees learned a great deal at the forum, it did not prove to be a springboard for action efforts.

A true action forum should be held at the conclusion of the second round of community circles. The Study Circles Resource Center suggests:

“The action forum at the end of each round of study circles is your most important opportunity to galvanize problem solving efforts. At the kickoff, announce the date of the action forum. Invite the study circle participants, coalition members, area organizations working on the issue, and other community members. Use the study circle records to identify themes which emerged from the groups. At the action forum, give people the opportunity to sign up for task forces on those themes. For example, the task forces for a program on race might focus on themes such as improving police-community relations, reducing bias crime, and dealing with race relations among young people. Ask people with some professional expertise in each topic to join that task force. If you are writing a report based on the study circle records, the action forum is an excellent time to release it.

After the action forum, it is critical for program organizers to stay in touch with the task forces. Help them get off the ground by identifying convenors and setting meeting dates. To keep task force efforts in the public eye, create a newsletter which reports on their progress, and encourage newspapers and television stations to cover their work. Provide ways for newcomers to join task forces as the program moves along. The study circle program in Lima, Ohio, went even further, winning a grant from the Ohio Bureau of Justice Services to fund a Violence Prevention Center. The Center was designed to provide staff time to support the eleven task forces which arose from the study circle program. Finally, it is important to celebrate the task force achievements and build on them. One way to do this is through

periodic large-group meetings.”

– excerpted from *Focus on Study Circles*, Winter 1998

#### **D. Include more policymakers in the study circles**

The experience of other communities has shown that a study circle program has its greatest effect on policymaking if public officials themselves are among the participants in the groups. In that way, their authority and expertise is brought into the process, but public officials are treated like fellow human beings rather than experts who have the potential to solve problems by themselves. Their wisdom is included in the mix, but they are not put on the spot. Rather than being treated as the distant recipients of formalized public input, they are treated as powerful collaborators in addressing common problems. Public officials have the chance to hear the concerns of real citizens and realize that citizens are capable of addressing complex issues.

#### **Recommendation #2: Create circles which include both city-dwellers and suburbanites**

One of the most innovative aspects of the Community Circle Collaborative program is its focus on regional issues. Segregation in housing and education is an issue with a regional scope, requiring deliberation and action by people in multiple communities. However, the majority of the community circles were limited to people who lived or worked in a particular area. This made it much more difficult for suburbanites to understand the concerns of city-dwellers, and vice versa.

During the second round, institutions could be paired so that each study circle included people from more than one community. For example, a church in Minneapolis with 10 people signed up to participate could be paired with a suburban Kiwanis Club bringing 10 people. The institutions could meet at either site (or an alternate site), and split their pool of 20 people into two community circles.

Another strategy which could be used along with or instead of the pairing approach would be to locate all the community circles at “sectional” sites. The Twin Cities region could be divided into sections like the spokes of a wheel, with each section including some urban areas as well as second- and third-ring suburbs. All the participants for that section could meet at a large facility with many rooms, such as a school, college campus, library, or community center. On the first evening, participants could be assigned to diverse community circles on the spot. Since multiple circles would be meeting on the same evening in the same building, participants could be brought together for a brief reporting session (20 minutes) at the end of each session. This strategy was used successfully in a study circle program in Oklahoma, where it also ensured greater media coverage since reporters could attend the reporting sessions and get a quick snapshot of the deliberations.

Community circles with a mix of urbanites and suburbanites would probably make the experience more unique, illuminating, and exciting for participants. In addition, action groups or task forces which emerged from the action forum or the community circles themselves would be more likely to combine city-dwellers and suburbanites. That kind of cooperation, in itself, would make a statement to the rest of the region.

#### **Recommendation #3: Improving racial, ethnic, and gender diversity**

##### **A. Race and ethnicity**

The full group of participants (350+) was fairly representative of the Twin Cities community as a whole in terms of race/ethnicity. However, individual groups did not reflect this diversity. As a result, some participants perceived that the process was not representative. A number of comments were made regarding how “the right people aren’t here.”

The suggestions contained in Recommendation #2, above, would help address this problem. However, the Community Circles Collaborative might also expand further, recruiting organizations representing constituencies which weren’t adequately represented in the first round. These could include service clubs and congregations that are known to appeal to members of particular groups. Pairing congregations and other sponsoring organizations to promote racial and ethnic intermingling would be a good measure, even if the urban-suburban strategy mentioned above is not utilized. A third approach would involve deliberately assigning volunteers of one ethnicity to join a discussion group dominated by another. Because it is safe to presume that the vast majority of participants are persons of good will and intent, finding volunteers willing to cross barriers should not be difficult.

## **B. Gender**

The group of participants as a whole was not well-balanced by gender. Men made up only about one-fourth of the participants. The all-female memberships of a couple of study circles even remarked on the absence of male counterparts and asked what could be done to “get the men here.”

Although gender imbalance is not uncommon for a volunteer group of this type, gender imbalance needs to be addressed in the next round of circles. One possible approach would be to specifically invite participation by male-dominated clubs or the men’s groups from various faith communities.

### **Recommendation #4: Give more training and support to facilitators**

The reports from the circles, and the surveys completed by the facilitators themselves, suggest that the quality of facilitation was uneven. This is one of the potential pitfalls of using volunteers, but it need not be a fatal one.

EHEP could turn to professional facilitators to conduct the next round of meetings, but this is not necessary nor even particularly wise. What is needed is better training and support for volunteer facilitators. For example, at least one facilitator complained that the group he or she led frequently strayed from the topic – without any apparent understanding that it is the job of the facilitator to keep the group focused and moving, so it can produce the results it wants within the allotted time.

The facilitator training process and packet reflect this failure to teach the basics. Training emphasized the content of the sessions and cultural considerations – both critical topics, to be sure, but not to the exclusion of learning how to lead a productive meeting, keep the group focused, mediate conflict, and handle difficult people (“difficult” here referring to any number of problems, including glibness, silence, stonewalling, attempts to dominate, etc.).

*Getting people involved in addressing public issues is not a “nice” thing. . . .*

*What you want people to say is not that it is a nice thing to do  
but that it’s an absolutely necessary thing to do.*

*– Martha McCoy, Study Circles Resource Center*

Given that some of the facilitators are relatively inexperienced, using co-facilitators might be invaluable. Experienced facilitators could be paired with facilitators who are new to the process. Pairing facilitators of different ethnicities (or a young person and an adult) would also make a statement to the participants about the inclusivity of the project.

Having a monitor present to step in and redirect the group's energy might also be helpful. A monitor can keep an eye on several groups at a time and keep tabs on the clock as well. The monitor's presence allows each facilitator to engage fully in the group's discussion and ensure that both substance and direction remain relevant. Moreover, should any facilitator encounter difficulty with a particular group – belligerence, refusal to focus, etc. – someone else is present to mediate and help the group get moving in positive ways again. The presence of a monitor can aid neophyte and experienced facilitators alike.

In CCC's case, the difficulties in using monitors are logistical: If each group is meeting at its own place and time, it is simply infeasible for a single monitor to be present. Neither would this be an efficient use of anyone's time. Moreover, the number of monitors available will necessarily be limited by the need for each one to be highly experienced in facilitation and/or team leadership. These difficulties could be overcome through a different approach to scheduling discussions.

#### **Recommendation #5: Schedule all meeting times in advance**

Ironically, it is possible that individual groups were given *too much* latitude in scheduling their own meetings – which means that each person's dentist appointment, TV viewing habits, softball league, family demands, vacation and other prior commitments interfered with circle meetings. Multiply this effect by ten or fifteen circle members, and it becomes clear why scheduling was a problem.

Rather than leaving the scheduling decision wide open, it may be more effective to set up group meeting times in advance. For example, meetings in each round of discussions could be slated to take place at one of four or five predetermined times at one of four or five predetermined locations. Discussants would be asked to select one of those times and places to participate, either for the entire series or on a meeting-by-meeting basis. Advance sign-ups would probably be necessary in order to make sure that all time slots have enough participants; otherwise, intended participants would have to be notified of a change in plans.

Although this approach might entail some additional work on the part of the organizers, it might also eliminate some work by eliminating confusion about who is meeting where, and when. Moreover, sponsoring organizations would remain heavily involved in coordinating meetings and keeping track of participants.

Adopting an approach similar to this one could produce several benefits:

- It would impose some discipline on the groups and indicate that the study circles are not a social event that takes place only when everyone is free, but a formalized process with demands of its own.
- It would allow coordinators to balance the sizes of the circles, eliminating problems caused by poor attendance in some groups while others overflow.
- It would allow individuals who might miss one set time to “make up” a session at a different time, thus facilitating participation in the entire series of discussions.
- It would allow individuals to sample different locations, if desired, thus exposing them to a much wider range of viewpoints and ideas.
- It would enable the circle coordinators at any given location to balance racial and gender

representation more effectively, either by pairing sponsoring organizations or by randomly assigning incoming individuals to different discussion groups.

- It would allow for the efficient use of monitors in support of facilitators.
- It would put everyone on essentially the same timetable, with a clear beginning and a clear end.

One potential drawback to this approach is that some groups would lose the continuity and, hence, the familiarity that foster trust and openness. However, the process itself can help to encourage such openness. Moreover, most discussion groups will probably remain essentially intact throughout the entire series due to individual choices.

## **VI. Appendices**

- A. Background on EHEP, CCC
- B. Findings of facilitator questionnaire
- C. List of sponsors and participants

[Dick, anything I should add here from SCRC?]

To: Dick Little, EHEP  
From: J. Levine

22 pp. total

## I. Executive Summary: Principal Findings and Directions for the Future

## II. Background: The Community Study Circle Collaborative

*"It couldn't happen here." Not in Minneapolis-St. Paul, the political home of Hubert Humphrey: Minnesota, America's sane heartland. . . . The Twin Cities was immune to urban decline, inner-suburban decay, urban sprawl -- and the polarization that has devastated and divided older, larger regions. After all, we were not Chicago, Detroit, or Milwaukee. We were reform minded, and our philanthropic and governmental centers were coordinated and responsive. Then the 1980s hit, marking our Twin Cities with identical patterns of regional polarization. . . . If it could happen here, no American region is immune. Once polarization occurs, the concentration of poverty, disinvestment, middle-class flight, and urban sprawl grow more and more severe.*

*-- Myron Orfield, Metropolitica (1997: 1, emphasis added)*

State Legislator Myron Orfield was one of the first citizens in the region to realize that Twin Cities communities were becoming increasingly polarized along the lines of race and class. Changes in regional school districts pointed to serious issues of equity in both housing access and public education.

It is within this context that the Community Circle Collaborative (CCC) was launched. CCC is a metro-wide dialogue project that engages citizens from all walks of life, 5-15 at a time, in study circles held throughout the metro area. Originally a partnership among EHEP, the Minneapolis Initiative Against Racism (MIAR), the Minnesota Minority Education Partnership (MMEP), and the Minnesota Fair Housing Center, the CCC initiative has expanded into a wide-ranging coalition of community-based organizations, public staff and officials, and individuals working in a variety of fields, including social justice, race relations, housing, education, religion, law and social research.

CCC's study circles have been charged with discussing two central questions:

- What are the impacts of existing patterns of residential, economic and racial segregation on the educational achievement and life opportunities of Twin Cities area children and families?
- What can or should we do, as individuals and as a community, to enhance educational success and housing and economic opportunities for *all* children in the Twin Cities area?

These are the two critical questions facing the Twin Cities region as it moves toward the 21st Century.

*The diversity in our state is greatest among children . . . . So this is a long curve. We'd better start getting some of the answers right now, because they're going to affect an entire generation. -- Vivian Jenkins Nelson, INTER-RACE*

## A. What is a Community Study Circle?

The Community Circle Collaborative process is one way to sample the broadest possible spectrum of opinions within a community. It is also an effective way to generate informed conversations that can lead to new levels of citizenship and civic action. This process has been used all over the country to create a public voice about important issues and to help ensure that that voice is heard by decision-makers. Without the effort to bring people together for informed and civil conversation, the most extreme voices are free to frame the issues. Public-spirited conversation will be drowned out by shrill debate, our communities will become even more polarized, and our common interests and values will get lost in a sea of opposition and conflict. There is a need to create a public voice that recognizes our common interests and generates consensus about, or at least informed consent to, policies and actions designed to further the common good.

Why is this public conversation important? In part, it's because most of what we see today in the media and in public meetings is "positioning" or "posturing" -- that is, highly stylized communication. The purpose of this style is to advocate one point of view or another, at the expense of dialogue and, often, of decorum. Although widely accepted in the media, this type of communication ultimately leads to public cynicism and withdrawal from the political process. Not many people wish to become strident enough to compete in such a contrived forum. Community circles offer a refreshing change from the narrow and often restrictive discussions of the past and the competitive debates encouraged by the political process.

To "converse" means to "share words with others". It carries the implication of equality of opportunity and status, and of the give-and-take of exchange. Conversations, which shares ideas, thoughts and perspectives, are intended to lead to understanding. They help to clear the air by honestly reflecting the differences and similarities among the conversants.

The study circle is a well-tested, practical method for adult learning and social change. In a study circle, 5-20 people meet several times to discuss the various choices the community might make concerning a social or political issue. Complex issues are broken down into manageable pieces, and controversial topics are dealt with in depth. Each discussion lasts about two hours and is directed by a well-prepared discussion leader whose role is to aid in lively but focused discussion. The process is informal, democratic and highly participatory, so that the group can capitalize on the experience of all its members.

*People acting as citizens create new ways of working together and new ways of taking responsibility for what is publicly all of ours. -- Dick Little, Education and Housing Equity Project*

The community circles process recognizes that agreement is not necessary in order for a conversation to be successful. What *are* necessary are listening, reflecting, and speaking from both the head and the heart. Mutual respect and a belief in the enlightening and healing nature of sharing ideas -- across boundaries of ethnicity, geography, age, gender, socioeconomic status and even language -- can go a long way toward making a conversation rewarding for the community as well as the individuals involved. Moreover, they can become vehicles for community problem-solving and development of action coalitions, composed of individual citizens, community organizations, the business community and government, that are better able to effect meaningful change for the better.

In many cultures, circles are symbols of equality, fairness and completeness. The underlying premise of the Community Circles Collaborative process is that solutions to serious and often divisive issues can be found if we put aside our fears and prejudices and work together.

## B. The Need: Residential and Educational Segregation in the Twin Cities

The Education and Housing Equity Project (EHEP) was created in early 1995 by a group of education and housing advocates who shared a belief in the pressing need to link the issue of school desegregation with the broader issue of housing and neighborhood segregation. EHEP's mission is to act as a catalyst to build broad-based coalitions and engage the community in public conversations about and advocacy for promotion of racially and economically inclusive communities that give families of all incomes, races and ethnic backgrounds access to schools and housing throughout the metropolitan area.

*The reason it's critical that we talk is because words have different meanings to different people, and we have different levels of interpretation and reflection from our own experience, our history, our expectations, our own knowledge of where we can go.*

— Dr. Josie Johnson

A few alarming facts highlight the nature and depth of the concerns they wished to address:

- The proportion of people of color who live in poverty is higher in Minneapolis/St. Paul than in any other central city in the nation: 37 percent of African-Americans, 40 percent of Native Americans, 32 percent of Latinos.
- Concentrations of poverty and income disparities between the region's central cities and its suburbs are also among the highest in the nation. The poverty rate in Minneapolis is 18.5 percent, in St. Paul 16.7 percent, but in the suburbs it is only 4.5 percent.
- The central cities are home to only 22 percent of the children enrolled in regional schools, but to 55 percent of the region's impoverished elementary school children.
- Between 1970 and 1984, the population of the metro area increased by 9.7 percent but the land it occupied increased by 25.1 percent.

## C. Chronology of CCC Events

The Community Circle Colaborative is now more than a year old. A brief chronology of its activities and related events appears below.

**December 1996:** The "Beyond Busing" Kick-Off Forum was held for project sponsors. This event was attended by more than 100 people representing a wide variety of organizations: churches, advocacy groups, academia, public agencies and foundations. Significantly, the event took place in the suburbs (in the St. Louis Park City Council chambers), making it clear from the beginning that this was not a central-city effort but a metro-wide effort. The first two speakers, former St. Paul Mayor George Latimer and education expert Josie Johnson, Ph.D., helped to set the context of the project and to encourage and motivate participants. The two speakers who followed them, Curt Johnson, chair of the Metropolitan Council; and Yusef Mgeni, President of the Urban Coalition, provided information and insights regarding the breadth and depth of segregation problems and costs in the metropolitan area. Following the speakers, individuals representing the state legislature, an outer-ring suburban church, an inner-ring suburban school, a nonprofit housing developer, the media and the Minneapolis Mayor's Office all described why they

planned to participate in the project and urged others to join them. As the event concluded, many new sponsors submitted their pledges to participate by organizing study circles.

**February 1997:** Training for study-circle facilitators was held, and the first Discussion Guide for participants was issued.

**March-June 1997:** Study circle discussion groups met 3-5 times each to discuss the two questions given above. Each group produced a brief report summarizing its discussion and findings. Nearly 350 people participated in these discussions.

**May 1997:** CCC held a Community Forum at Macalester College in St. Paul. This forum was attended by many of the individuals who had participated in study circles and gave them a chance not only to share the results of their deliberations and but also to explore the extent of commonalities among the different groups. The Forum featured Martha McCoy, the Executive Director of the (national) Study Circles Resource Center, whose presentation was followed by two "conversations." The first, moderated by Vivian Jenkins Nelsen, President and CEO of INTER-RACE, focused on the first study-circle question (regarding impacts); the second, moderated by George Latimer, addressed the second question, which focuses on potential solutions. (Section III of this report summarizes the findings of all the study circles.)

**June 1997:** The Institute on Race and Poverty delivers to the McKnight Foundation a report entitled "Examining the Relationship Between Housing, Education, and Persistent Segregation." This report identifies the Twin Cities region as one of the ten most segregated metropolitan regions in the United States.

*The Twin Cities have reached an important time to consider which path it will follow. This community has already begun to creep down the path so familiar to many large urban areas. If the Twin Cities community is to reverse its course, it must begin now. This community must seriously examine and confront what is happening here, and it must come together for real, proven solutions. -- The Institute on Race and Poverty, University of Minnesota*

**July 1997:** All study circle reports were submitted to EHEP. In addition, facilitators and group organizers completed a questionnaire intended to help the study-circle organizers to learn more about the process -- successes as well as difficulties -- and to glean suggestions concerning how better to proceed in the next round of discussions.

**July-October 1997:** Individual participants who represented interested groups made presentations to their respective organizations, local communities and constituencies.

**September 1997:** The National Conference on Race Relations and America's Public Education System takes place. One of the discussion sites is the Twin Cities. Among the practical issues identified are housing segregation, economic inequity, and the need for long-term solutions rather than quick fixes.

**April 1998:** The final report of the first round of study circles, "Beyond Busing: The First Metrowide Dialogue on the Challenges of Education and Housing Segregation," is issued

### III. Study Circle Reports

#### A. Issues

*We are in very deep denial. We believe we aren't like Detroit, but we are;  
it's just happening more slowly here.*

The necessary first step in trying to solve thorny social problems is to ensure that those problems are understood in much the same way by all. The Community Circles Collaborative therefore focused its study groups' initial attention on issue identification and discussion.

The issues identified by CCC participants fell into four fairly distinct groupings:

- Issues related to regional growth and equity in terms of investment, employment and social relations;
- Systemic issues related to housing segregation and neighborhood quality;
- Systemic issues related to education; and
- Issues that arise primarily at the level of the individual.

A small degree of liberty has been taken to clarify meaning or to combine similar thoughts expressed in different ways by more than one participant or study circle. Every effort has been made, however, to retain the essence of what appeared in the study circle reports.

Issues shown in italic type were identified by more than one study group.

#### 1. *Issues of regional growth and equity*

When asked to determine how many societies the Twin Cities have become, people responded in two different ways. One group suggested that we have become "three societies: The very rich, working people, and the poor." Another described it differently: "Two -- those who work and those who don't." Regardless of how it is said, though, there was a strong recognition among participants that the region has become polarized into distinct, and often mutually distrusting, camps.

The issues that appear in this grouping deal with the broad context of regional equity -- and inequity. They cluster around three topics: investment, employment and social relations.

##### **Investment:**

*Spatial mismatch between available fiscal and economic resources and high-order fiscal and social needs -- for example, northern part of region needs more infrastructure*  
*Biases in business lending that shortchange women- and minority-owned businesses*  
*Need for more entrepreneurship programs, e.g., micro-loans, money circles*  
*Perceived and real disadvantages of central-city sites, due to crime, presence of pollutants and an unskilled workforce*

*A focus on the short-term and the bottom line, disregarding long-standing evidence that a "rising tide" does not lift all boats*

Shortage of businesses that are committed to being good corporate citizens

Growth containment affects provision and cost of infrastructure

*Suburbanites like to have the benefits of the city  
but do not like to pay for them.*

**Employment:**

*Spatial mismatch between available jobs and many of the unemployed -- e.g., the northern part of the region needs to provide more jobs*

Biases in job hiring and wage-setting practices

Shortage of reverse-commute options that can take inner-city workers to suburban jobs

*Shortage of quality affordable child care, especially at "non-traditional" work times*

Changing workforce demographics: more persons of color, more seniors, more women supporting households

Challenge presented by people who are physically or psychologically unable to "work a 9-5 job"

Underrecognition by business that well-trained employees lead to greater profitability

*Lack of benefits with many part-time and low-wage jobs*

Jobs accessible to residents of poor communities often go to outsiders

Lack of sufficient interest in and support for entrepreneurship in minority and poor communities

**Social relations:**

*Distortions and stereotypes in media reporting*

*Reporting of crime that is disproportionate to its occurrence*

Need for true justice that is timely, fair and makes wise use of parole and community-service options

Polarization reinforced by racial categories on government forms

General breakdown of family structure and cohesion due to economic demands, lifestyle choices, decline in community support

Perceived need to keep track of people with criminal records (e.g., community right-to-know regulations for known sex offenders)

Tendency for people to remain close to their support networks

*Decline in traditional values, especially a decline in personal integrity and responsibility*

Lack of courage to make wise but unpopular decisions

*Churches can perpetuate values  
but are not always good role models*

**2. Systemic issues related to housing and neighborhoods**

There was a generally high level of consensus on housing and neighborhood issues, which clustered around two topics: housing stock and neighborhood environment. By far the most often-cited issue was that of exclusionary suburban zoning and development practices, which were mentioned specifically by one-fourth of the reporting groups.

*The people who can afford to pay taxes live out in the suburbs, and the inner city has been getting poorer and poorer. It will continue until there is some massive political determination that we're going to make our inner cities the most attractive places to live, or at least as attractive for all kinds of people as the suburbs are.*

**Housing:**

- Lack of investment in poor or declining neighborhoods
- Poor housing stock that repels stable families, discourages investment
- Lead-based paint and other health hazards
- Lack of neighborhood diversity in housing types, which leads to homogeneous populations
- Inflexible central-city zoning and other regulations that prohibit use of many vacant/abandoned buildings as shelter*
- Shortage of affordable housing*
- Punitive rental property taxes
- High cost of land
- Poor enforcement of existing fair housing laws
- Lack of awareness of opportunities and options among low-income households

*In Minneapolis, the government is sponsoring the destruction of affordable housing, through zoning, through licensing, through housing codes. The city has destroyed countless affordable neighborhoods.*

**Neighborhood environment:**

- Unequal power in neighborhood/community relations*
- Inadequate resources for general maintenance, including trash pick-up and yardwork
- Lack of resources to facilitate neighborhood involvement
- Transience caused by poor housing stock, low incomes*
- Land-use plans that give highest priority to accommodating cars (e.g., intrusive highway routes)
- Inadequate transit service (frequency, hours, direct routing and choice of destinations)*
- Exclusionary suburban zoning regulations (e.g., minimum lot size and square footage, garage requirements, development fees)*
- Redlining (insurance, lending, cab service, police response)*
- Crime and perceptions of crime*
- Need to improve conditions for those who "remain behind"

*More affluent neighborhoods [have] essentially accepted socioeconomic redlining.*

### 3. *Systemic issues related to education*

Perspectives on the shortcomings of the educational system were quite diverse but fall into two groupings: One focuses on the in-school experience, the other on the interaction between the school and the surrounding community.

#### **The school as educational institution:**

- Teachers not living in the community
- Few opportunities to experience diversity
- Institutional discrimination: students receiving differential treatment due to race/color, learning ability, economic status, perceived intelligence, and/or athletic ability, which can lead to artificially raised or lowered expectations
- Focus on short-term results when long-term solutions are needed
- Failure to teach the basics
- Lack of adequate [curriculum] structure
- Classes that are too big
- Inability to sustain children's enthusiasm for school beyond 3rd or 4th grade
- Too few minority teachers
- Insufficient counselors and inadequate counseling
- Schools being asked to do far more than teach academics
- Lack of effective means of dealing with children from problem situations; at-risk children "falling through the cracks"

*Where we do get the minorities to move out into the suburbs, they have the money, they have the wherewithal, but we . . . have a problem in the sensitivity of our teachers and our educational system . . . One of the biggest problems that [minority kids] are finding is that their teachers are prejudiced. So we move out into the suburbs, and what we encounter are teachers who will not be fair with these kids . . . They're also scared of being in school, because they're afraid of being called names, and if there's a fight, they get kicked out. So there's a racial imbalance.*

#### **The school in the community:**

- The school system is not user-friendly or parent-friendly
- Transience disrupting children's stability, ability to learn
- School violence (e.g., children carrying weapons)
- Unequal distribution of school resources, both within and between school districts
- Perception that central-city schools are underfunded
- Special challenges presented by schools impacted by concentrated poverty
- Lack of adequate transportation/transit, which results in reduced access to extra-curricular activities and school choice
- The public-school monopoly -- lack of competition and choice
- Poor nutrition among school children
- Language barriers among recent immigrants
- Under-educated, over-worked parents who cannot adequately help their children
- [Household] stability affects academic achievement
- Need for transitional housing to support schools

*You can't learn  
if you are hungry.*

#### *4. Issues related to individuals*

These issues reflect more general concerns about the state of our society as a whole as well as the plight of individuals within it. Some of these issues are pandemic -- that is, they plague people in all races, classes and locations; others are more specific to particular circumstances, especially the circumstances of those living in areas of concentrated poverty.

##### **Society-wide issues:**

- Substance abuse and addiction*
- Breakdown in the institution of marriage*
- Lack of recognition for different family types, e.g., extended families*
- Lack of self-esteem in children due to inadequate parenting*
- Lack of respect for the rights, beliefs and property of others*
- Lack of respect for teachers and other elders*
- Fear leading to isolation, high levels of stress*
- Negative stereotyping*
- Racism*
- Denial of racism/segregation problem*
- Need for more welcoming in the community*

*'The white teachers don't like us.  
When a white kid does something good, they get praised.  
When we do something good, they say nothing.'*

##### **Issues more common in areas of concentrated poverty:**

- Low incomes/joblessness leading to extralegal economic activity*
- Poor parental supervision of children and lack of other supportive/responsible adults*
- Lack of employed role models*
- Individuals focused on day-to-day survival unlikely to make education a top priority*
- Unwillingness or inability to take personal responsibility (e.g., in housing: use of illegal subleases and presence of unaccounted-for tenants)*
- Lack of pride in surroundings*
- High level of mobility leading to instability in family, education*
- Inability to set and work toward goals*
- Entitlement mentality promoted by welfare dependency*
- Victim mentality promoted by discrimination and dependency*

*Describing the problems of the inner city as a result of abstract 'racism' is not helpful  
because fighting 'racism' seems a futile exercise.*

## B. Potential solutions

*We decided early on that the issues of housing, education and jobs were not mutually exclusive, and that if we had to do anything, we had to do all of them . . . . One of the things we said is that if the economic bottom line drives the process, then a rising economic tide should diminish segregation. But does it?*

The potential solutions that appear here should be regarded as a valuable first cut. As the Community Circles Collaborative proceeds with its second round of discussions, every effort will be made to deepen participants' understanding of the connections among the issues and to help them develop meaningful and effective responses to those issues.

It is also important to remember that many potential solutions are implicit in the issue statements. For example, to address the issue described as "biases in business lending that shortchange women- and minority-owned businesses," a potential solution might be to work to eliminate those biases, or to find other ways to make more investment capital available to women and minorities. In this sense, the issues lists should not be dismissed as potential sources of ideas.

Again, as was the case with the issues, every attempt has been made to capture the essence of what emerged from the discussants, while also combining and clarifying ideas where appropriate.

*When something isn't working,  
try something new.*

### 1. Employment and opportunity

Suggestions for increasing employment and economic opportunity generally addressed broad topical categories, such as entrepreneurship and child care.

Adopt the OxFam approach that sets up micro-loan and revolving credit programs ("money circles") among groups of inner-city residents. This will help to foster entrepreneurship.

Increase funding for women- and minority-owned businesses.

Require basic benefits with all full-time jobs.

Offer incentives to lenders to make business and home loans to low-income persons.

Recruit corporations as community partners that can help to provide transportation to job sites, child care, and job offers to center-city residents.

Improve the transit system by expanding reverse-commute options and using a wider variety of vehicle and service types (e.g., company vans, vanpools, dial-a-ride systems, bus-service rerouting).

Expand the funding for and availability of adequate child care.

*We found ourselves going back and forth. First, someone would say, well, it's an economic solution we need here, or it's an economic cause of this problem. And then right away someone else would counter with, it's lack of community, it's 'heart' things. What we eventually came up with is that we have to have solutions that are addressed to both sides of the problem, because one or the other isn't going to do it.*

## 2. *Societal relations and resources*

Suggestions related to social relations focused on communities of faith and sources of information:

- Partner churches to offer and encourage multi-cultural experiences for their congregations.
- Provide anti-racism training and materials for media staff members.
- Work more through communities of faith and rely more on faith-based programs, which are [often] more successful than comparable secular programs.
- Keep public libraries open for longer hours, especially evenings and weekends.

*Congregations need to move  
'outside the congregational walls.'*

## 3. *Housing and neighborhoods*

The most logical breakdown of potential solutions in this category is between housing and neighborhoods.

### **Housing:**

- Mix small apartment buildings with other housing types in new developments.
- Allow mixed-use zoning that permits people to live, for example, above stores.
- Increase the flexibility of various codes to assist large families, for example by allowing three persons in each bedroom.
- Increase the number of duplexes and triplexes with resident owners.
- Fund experiments in shared living.
- Expand the supply of transitional housing.
- Experiment with ways to reduce the profit motive vis-a-vis construction and rehabilitation of affordable housing.
- Reinstitute some kind of fair-share housing requirement regionwide.
- Put teeth in the Livable Communities Act and the Community Reinvestment Act.
- Provide better and more consistent code enforcement.
- Increase resources to make landlords accountable for repairs and treatment of tenants.
- Offer more widespread down-payment assistance to persons of limited means.
- Couple household support programs with housing choice and subsidy.
- Test "money circles" as a source of funding for home improvements and other family/household needs.
- Experiment with payment-assistance programs, similar to existing utility-assistance programs (e.g., voluntary payments by utility customers to help those in need).

### **Neighborhoods:**

- Pair seniors and young parents so they can get to know one another and exchange services, for example swapping occasional child care for lawn mowing
- Expand and support Neighborhood Watch programs.
- Improve emergency support systems, as well as awareness of and access to them.

*People like to be with  
people like themselves.*

#### 4. Education

Ideas for improving public education ran the gamut from those promoting general improvement for all students, regardless of race or socioeconomic status, to those specifically targeting at-risk youngsters from a wide variety of backgrounds. These suggestions fell into several groupings: curriculum and teaching, student support, school choice, recognition of diversity and community relations.

*If we go back to neighborhood schools, poverty areas must have the best, strongest teachers.*

##### Curriculum and teaching improvements:

- Teach all students life skills, such as money management, parenting, how to look for a job and how to select appropriate housing.
- Eliminate state curriculum standards except for testing.
- Require academic tests at the elementary, middle-junior high and senior high school levels.
- Rate schools on academic achievement.
- Develop different learning tracks, including at least one that provides a good education to those who will not go to [an academic]college.
- Expand work-study opportunities that do not allow teen-agers to work in fast-food places -- for example, home construction/rehabilitation.
- Encourage/recruit corporate sponsorships and internships. Involve businesses in helping students better visualize careers and career paths and learn the skills they will need.
- Educate students for civic participation.
- Require community-service hours, even before high school.
- Equalize school-district spending per child.
- Lengthen both the school day and the school year.

*It is time to leave the premise that everyone is qualified to attend college. It is very important for our country to have mechanics, plumbers, carpenters and others who perform such useful tasks. Dignity is in all work and unfortunately that has been lost.*

##### Student support:

- Move away from a "fix the kid" approach to a "fix the system" approach.
- Enhance programs that prevent drop-outs.
- Offer more tutoring.
- Expand mentoring programs.
- Expand after-school activities, especially in the fine and performing arts and other non-athletic program areas.
- Get truants off the streets and into a community center, workplace or community-service setting.
- Require uniforms (although not necessarily "traditional" ones).
- Provide better and more plentiful counseling that is more holistic and incorporates help with chemical abuse.
- Sponsor "burning issues" clubs, lunches or other time to help youngsters deal with issues at home.

*Kids are afraid to go to school because of racism, they're afraid because of sexism, homophobia . . . When they're there, the children are so worried about, am I going to get to my next class, am I going to get home, am I going to get beat up on the way home, am I going to have my lunch money for lunch -- that learning is secondary.*

**School choice:**

Allow children to go to any [public] school they want.  
Support community schools -- "stop busing madness."  
"Bus for programs, not for numbers."

*Teachers in the public school system are very unprepared for kids of color. Training needs to address not only multiculturalism but it needs to address some of the factors of poverty and how they impact on kids. They need to look at learning styles. They need to look at how they as teachers can facilitate involvement by parents and community members.*

**Diversity:**

Fund learning opportunities that bring together or pair students from divergent backgrounds.  
Use instruction and programs focused on the environment and ecology to bring together all groups in the community in a common concern and in common enterprise.  
Train teachers in cultural competency.  
Imbue the curriculum with diversity, rather than making diversity a "special event" or giving it superficial treatment.  
Offer scholarships to students of color who agree to come back and teach for a minimum period of time.

**Community relations:**

Experiment with "peer parent" and buddy programs that help newcomers feel less isolated and become more involved in their children's schools.  
Strengthen the non-educational/pre-school support system that helps to relieve problems in the schools, which consists of programs like Head Start, parenting education, mentoring, quality child care and non-school recreation.  
Incorporate community facilities, such as community centers, social service centers and health-care facilities, within or adjacent to schools to give everyone a "stake" in the success of those schools.

*I remember when there were three black teachers in the Minneapolis public schools. And yet there were students of color that were going through that school system, combating racism as individuals, and going on to become successful participants in society. We can blame a lot of things on racism, but let's not fall into the trap of using that as an excuse for a lack of achievement.*

#### IV. Preparing for the Future

*I think a lot of white people believe, but sometimes don't feel that we can say it, that racism is probably a relatively minor cause of the relatively poor performance of minority kids . . . . It would be incredibly naive to discount the impact of racism on minority kids in our schools, but it seems to me far more significant causes are the breakdown of the African-American family and the lack of role models for young kids. And the sports culture I think is even more important than racism, the idolization of athletes, and the belief that African-American boys in the Minneapolis public schools have -- something like 85 percent feel they can have careers in professional sports . . . . But we don't ever talk about any of those other issues.*

A deeper look at the output of the study circles offers mostly good news: An important and meaningful dialogue has begun, all across the Twin Cities, and people of good will from all backgrounds are thinking about economic and racial disparities with an intensity not seen since the 1960s. Most of the participants grasp the gravity of the issues, understand at least in part their nature and connections to one another, and the necessity for action rather than passive acceptance.

Moreover, the dialogue has begun by generating a profile of many of the important issues. The Study Circle Reports (Section III of this report) contain a wealth of information, insights and ideas that can be used to propel further exploration of the role of race, changing economics and spatial segregation on housing and education throughout the region.

Having said that, though, it is worth taking a more critical look at the study circle output, and at the process itself, as a means of preparing the ground for another round of conversations. This section of the report is divided into two parts; the first focuses on issues of substance, both present and future, and the second focuses on issues of process.

##### A. Issues of Substance

One striking feature of the lists of issues is the virtually total absence of comments about gangs -- in spite of stories in the Minneapolis *Star-Tribune* and elsewhere relating gang activities to the recent upsurge in violent crime, particularly homicides. Perhaps more than any other event, the proliferation and expansion of gangs has contributed substantially to region-wide fears of violent crime. Although "violence in the schools" was mentioned, it was not connected to a broader recognition of the role of gangs in spreading fear in city neighborhoods and institutions.

Another minor shortcoming of the study-circles process is its failure to systematically explore causal connections. As a result, the study circles tended to produce, on the one hand, a litany of problems that is not prioritized, and, on the other hand, a litany of solutions that may be only haphazardly connected and responsive to the identified problems.

Nonetheless, several cause-and-effect relationships were noted by participants or by experts working with them. For example, one participant noted that solving problems of inequity would require a two-pronged attack: one directed at economics (for example, job training, adequate transportation and center-city investment) and the other directed at community (housing, public education and taxes). This approach recognizes that housing and educational segregation cannot be considered in a vacuum, but are affected by family incomes and community context. Similarly, the police chief of St. Louis Park noted that, based on the relatively high percentage of arrests that involve people of color, a great deal of racial "profiling" has taken place. Yet he was quick to add that the majority of such crimes are in fact crimes of poverty.

*Although the world has become a global village,  
whites are not ready to accept us even though we are equally qualified . . . .  
I think we should start a program where you interact  
with us and get to know us a little better . . . .  
Racism is alive.*

Unhappily, race and poverty too often go hand in hand in our society. As Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton said in their landmark book *American Apartheid*,

Most Americans vaguely realize that urban America is still a residentially segregated society, but few appreciate the depth of black segregation or the degree to which it is maintained by ongoing institutional arrangements and contemporary individual actions. . . . Residential segregation is not a neutral fact; it systematically undermines the social and economic well-being of blacks . . . [creating] a social environment where poverty and joblessness are the norm . . . (1993: 1-2).

Along the same lines, William Julius Wilson has said:

[T]he wage and employment gap between skilled and unskilled workers is growing partly because education and training are considered more important than ever in the new global economy. At the same time that changes in technology are producing new jobs, they are making many others obsolete. . . . More routine workers face the growing threat of job displacement. . . . The shift in demand has been especially devastating for those low-skilled workers whose incorporation into the mainstream economy has been marginal or recent. Even before the economic restructuring of the nation's economy, low-skilled African-Americans were at the end of the employment queue. Their economic situation has been further weakened because they tend to reside in communities that not only have higher jobless rates and lower employment growth but lack access to areas of higher employment and employment growth as well.

-- William Julius Wilson, *When Work Disappears*, 1996: 28-29

*We know that poverty isn't going anywhere, and racism isn't dead.*  
-- Vivian Jenkins Nelson, INTER-RACE

*A lot of times the white culture accepts this one particular way of looking at life, this very linear, Western type of norms and values, and they think that's reality . . . . Imagine they see a horse and a moose. They don't say, 'Oh, that's a moose,' they say, 'Oh, that's a bad horse.' We need to not have this invisible centering on the white and everybody else is 'other,' who is sort of a failed white.*

There may be more agreement on the pernicious effects of economic disparity than on those of race and discrimination. For example, one suburban group reported that "our circle cited 'institutional racism' as a myth created by many." This group did "not feel that race is a large issue. People are people, no matter what color or culture they are." One school worker remarked that "I don't see racism in the schools. I think there is a generous feeling of people trying. Maybe not always succeeding, but trying."

On the other hand, these remarks hint at what Curt Johnson calls the insidious nature of discrimination in Northern cities. At the "Beyond Busing" forum, he quoted from a letter received from an African-American friend upon his return to Houston after living in the Twin Cities for three years: "I left because of the racism . . . At least in the South, I could see the knife. In Minnesota, I didn't find the blood until I got home. It was so subtle, and I didn't realize until later and began to add it up . . . ."

Some connections between minority status, joblessness, educational opportunity and community decay do appear in the summaries of study-circle discussions. However, the fact that they are not clearly stated or explored suggests either (1) that few participants truly understand these relationships, or (2) that participants take them so for granted that they are no longer seen as salient.

This situation is further illustrated by two types of responses that, although not commonplace, view the region through ideological or unfocused lenses. One type essentially rejects all interventions intended to reduce segregation and income disparity: Since government has failed, everything associated with it should go. We should repeal taxes, end the prohibition on drugs, repeal labor laws and occupational licensing regulations, end the public-school monopoly, and rigidly separate business and state.

A second type of response takes the form of broad goal statements that move us no closer to real solutions:

- Limit growth and sprawl.
- Revitalize the urban core.
- Organize people at the grassroots level.
- Build partnerships among business, government and the community.
- Improve housing in the inner city.
- Develop a better public transportation system.

In a few cases, participants focused on "what we can do" without identifying the purpose in doing it -- for example, they said they would "meet with the mayor and the Board of Education," but did not say why.

In short, many of the findings of the study circles cover the surface of the issues but do not probe very deeply. Suggested solutions are uneven in character, time frame, comprehensiveness, relevance and practicality. Moreover, there was as much emphasis on problems that plague everyone, particularly in the realm of public education, as upon problems closely associated with racial and economic segregation.

However, none of this is unexpected in the first round of a citizen effort of this type. Although the effort to develop solutions in the last round of discussions was necessary to give participants a sense of achievement

and closure, it was premature in the sense that few people were ready intellectually and emotionally to propose truly innovative or meaningful solutions instead of reiterating "proven" ideas that may have little effect on the identified issues. This, too, is not unexpected: If housing desegregation were easy, it would have been achieved already.

### Guidelines for Future Circles

- A packet of short readings should be sent to all prospective participants. Some should re-emphasize regional problems, while others might highlight programs and initiatives being undertaken elsewhere in the country. This may be supplemented by a reading list for those who want to explore further.

Suggestions for this list:

Wilson, William Julius. 1987. *The Truly Disadvantaged*. One of the contemporary classics, this book links racial segregation and economic disadvantage in creative new ways. Wilson, almost single-handedly, reopened a debate that had been closed off for nearly twenty years.

Wilson, William Julius. 1996. *When Work Disappears*. Wilson's follow-up presents data, extracts from interviews with inner-city residents, and policy suggestions.

Massey, Douglas and Nancy Denton. 1993. *American Apartheid*. Another classic, this book takes issue with some of Wilson's conclusions and uses an impressive array of statistics to do so. An outstanding primer on the legacy of segregation.

Orfield, Myron. 1997. *Metropolitcs*. An alarming look at change in the Twin Cities region, which also gives a sense of what can be done at the state level to combat and channel that change.

Sapphire. 1996. *Push*. A first-person account of the life of an inner-city teenager; this book offers a realistic inside look at the challenges of growing up in urban America.

Downs, Anthony. 1973. *Opening Up the Suburbs*. Perhaps the seminal work in this series, it offers some ideas that are as fresh today as they were a generation ago.

Barnett, Jonathan. 1996. *The Fractured Metropolis*. An urban designer's look at what can be done to heal the fractures in our society.

American Planning Association. 1994. *Planning and Community Equity*. A collection of articles addressing the full range of equity issues: affordable housing, transportation, environmental degradation, social impacts, governance, capital investment and citizen participation.

- Focus discussions more tightly. The initial study questions were pretty broad and left a lot of room for interpretation without a lot of direction. Four or five more focused questions would help to structure the dialogue and produce more focused results as well. One question could be used for each study-circle meeting in the next series. Each question could look at a topical study area, perhaps in terms of specific linkages, e.g., economic opportunity and education, economic opportunity and community support (child care, transportation, etc.), affordable housing and desegregation/deconcentration, public schools and the community, race relations, etc. Each study circle could be given the option of choosing the questions it addresses from a more comprehensive list.

### B. Issues of Process

The study-circle process proved its value through not only the output of the discussions but the responses of most participants, who viewed it as a valuable experience they would like to continue or repeat. This occurred even though the process suffered from some initial organizational difficulties. Delays in getting the circles up and running, and in producing and finalizing participant materials, caused some frustration among coordinators, facilitators and participants alike. Scheduling meeting times seems to have been a

problem for nearly every circle. In spite of these circumstances, however, there seems to be a general sense that the process was worthwhile, and productive as well.

Creating meaningful change is more art than science. Most organizations that undertake such change fall short of their initial goals. This should not be viewed as "failure." Rather, it should be treated as an invaluable learning experience that could not be gained in any other way -- an experience that should energize and shape ongoing efforts.

Three specific process-related issues arose as a result of the first round of study circles. The first issue relates to group diversity, the second to group facilitation, and the third to group scheduling. These issues are addressed below.

*What you're doing is not a nice thing. . . .  
What you want people to say is not that it is a nice thing to do  
but that's an absolutely necessary thing to do.  
-- Martha McCoy, Study Circles Resource Center.*

### Improving Diversity

**Race and ethnicity:** The full group of participants (350+) was fairly representative of the Twin Cities community as a whole in terms of race/ethnicity. However, individual groups did not reflect this diversity. As a result, some participants perceived that the process was not representative. A number of comments were made regarding how "the right people aren't here."

Several methods of improving racial and ethnic diversity might be used. One would be to invite the participation of secular service clubs and congregations that are known to appeal to members of particular groups. Another would be to pair congregations and other sponsoring organizations to promote racial and ethnic intermingling. A third would involve deliberately assigning volunteers of one heritage to join a discussion group dominated by another. Because it is safe to presume that the vast majority of participants are persons of good will and intent, finding volunteers willing to cross barriers should not be difficult. (Besides, isn't that the whole point of this exercise -- crossing barriers?)

**Gender:** The group of participants as a whole was not well-balanced by gender. Men made up only about one-fourth of the participants. The all-female memberships of a couple of study circles even remarked on the absence of male counterparts and asked what could be done to "get the men here."

Although gender imbalance is not uncommon for a volunteer group of this type, gender imbalance needs to be addressed in the next round of circles. One possible approach would be to specifically invite participation by the men's groups from various sponsoring faith communities. Another would be to invite participation by business owners and managers, who -- for better or worse -- are still predominately male.

*It's important to get the advantaged to understand how they're affected  
by [the] plight of low-income minorities.*

## Improving Group Facilitation

Good facilitation is the key to good results. The reports from the circles, and the surveys completed by the facilitators themselves, suggest that the quality of facilitation was uneven. This is one of the potential pitfalls of using volunteers, but it need not be a fatal one.

EHEP could turn to professional facilitators to conduct the next round of meetings, but this is not necessary nor even particularly wise. What is needed is better training and support for volunteer facilitators. For example, at least one facilitator complained that the group he or she led frequently strayed from the topic -- without any apparent understanding that it is the job of the facilitator to keep the group focused and moving so it can produce the results it wants within the allotted time.

The facilitator training process and packet reflect this failure to teach the basics. Training emphasized the content of the sessions and cultural considerations -- both critical topics, to be sure, but not to the exclusion of learning how to lead a productive meeting, keep the group focused, mediate conflict, and handle difficult people ("difficult" here referring to any number of problems, including glibness, silence, stonewalling, attempts to dominate, etc.).

Given that some of the facilitators are relatively inexperienced, having a monitor present to step in and redirect the group's energy can be invaluable. A monitor can keep an eye on several groups at a time and keep tabs on the clock as well. The monitor's presence allows each facilitator to engage fully in the group's discussion and ensure that both substance and direction remain relevant. Moreover, should any facilitator encounter difficulty with a particular group -- belligerence, refusal to focus, etc. -- someone else is present to mediate and help the group get moving in positive ways again. The presence of a monitor can aid neophyte and experienced facilitators alike.

In CCC's case, the difficulties in using monitors are logistical: If each group is meeting at its own place and time, it is simply infeasible for a single monitor to be present. Neither would this be an efficient use of anyone's time. Moreover, the number of monitors available will necessarily be limited by the need for each one to be highly experienced in facilitation and/or team leadership. These difficulties could be overcome through a different approach to scheduling discussions.

## Improving Study-Circle Scheduling

Ironically, it is possible that individual groups were given *too much* latitude in scheduling their own meetings -- which means that each person's dentist appointment, TV viewing habits, softball league, family demands, vacation and other prior commitments interfered with circle meetings. Multiply this effect by ten or fifteen circle members, and it becomes clear why scheduling was a problem.

Rather than leaving the scheduling decision wide open, it may be more effective to set up group meeting times in advance. For example, meetings in each round of discussions could be slated to take place at one of four or five predetermined times at one of four or five predetermined locations. Discussants would be asked to select one of those times and places to participate, either for the entire series or on a meeting-by-meeting basis. Advance sign-ups would probably be necessary in order to make sure that all time slots have enough participants; otherwise, intended participants would have to be notified of a change in plans.

Although this approach might entail some additional work on the part of the organizers, it might also eliminate some work by eliminating confusion about who is meeting where, and when. Moreover,

sponsoring organizations would remain heavily involved in coordinating meetings and keeping track of participants.

Adopting an approach similar to this one could produce several benefits:

- It would impose some discipline on the groups and indicate that the study circles are not a social event that takes place only when everyone is free, but a formalized process with demands of its own.
- It would allow coordinators to balance the sizes of the circles, eliminating problems caused by poor attendance in some groups while others overflow.
- It would allow individuals who might miss one set time to "make up" a session at a different time, thus facilitating participation in the entire series of discussions.
- It would allow individuals to sample different locations, if desired, thus exposing them to a much wider range of viewpoints and ideas.
- It would enable the circle coordinators at any given location to balance racial and gender representation more effectively, either by pairing sponsoring organizations or by randomly assigning incoming individuals to different discussion groups.
- It would allow for the efficient use of monitors in support of facilitators.
- It would put everyone on essentially the same timetable, with a clear beginning and a clear end.

One potential drawback to this approach is that some groups would lose the continuity and, hence, the familiarity that foster trust and openness. However, the process itself can help to encourage such openness. Moreover, most discussion groups will probably remain essentially intact throughout the entire series due to individual choices.

## **V. Plans for the Future**

## **VI. Appendices**

- A. Background on EHEP, CCC
- B. Study circle reports
- C. Findings of facilitator questionnaire
- D. List of sponsors and participants

## I. Executive Summary: Principal Findings and Directions for the Future

## II. Background: The Community Study Circle Collaborative

*"It couldn't happen here." Not in Minneapolis-St. Paul, the political home of Hubert Humphrey: Minnesota, America's sane heartland. . . . The Twin Cities was immune to urban decline, inner-suburban decay, urban sprawl -- and the polarization that has devastated and divided older, larger regions. After all, we were not Chicago, Detroit, or Milwaukee. We were reform minded, and our philanthropic and governmental centers were coordinated and responsive. Then the 1980s hit, marking our Twin Cities with identical patterns of regional polarization. . . . If it could happen here, no American region is immune. Once polarization occurs, the concentration of poverty, disinvestment, middle-class flight, and urban sprawl grow more and more severe.*

*-- Myron Orfield, Metropolitics (1997: 1, emphasis added)*

State Legislator Myron Orfield was one of the first citizens in the region to realize that Twin Cities communities were becoming increasingly polarized along the lines of race and class. Changes in regional school districts pointed to serious issues of equity in both housing access and public education.

It is within this context that the Community Circle Collaborative (CCC) was launched. CCC is a metro-wide dialogue project that engages citizens from all walks of life, 5-15 at a time, in study circles held throughout the metro area. Originally a partnership among EHEP, the Minneapolis Initiative Against Racism (MIAR), the Minnesota Minority Education Partnership (MMEP), and the Minnesota Fair Housing Center, the CCC initiative has expanded into a wide-ranging coalition of community-based organizations, public staff and officials, and individuals working in a variety of fields, including social justice, race relations, housing, education, religion, law and social research.

CCC's study circles have been charged with discussing two central questions:

- What are the impacts of existing patterns of residential, economic and racial segregation on the educational achievement and life opportunities of Twin Cities area children and families?
- What can or should we do, as individuals and as a community, to enhance educational success and housing and economic opportunities for *all* children in the Twin Cities area?

These are the two critical questions facing the Twin Cities region as it moves toward the 21st Century.

*The diversity in our state is greatest among children. . . . So this is a long curve. We'd better start getting some of the answers right now, because they're going to affect an entire generation. -- Vivian Jenkins Nelson, INTER-RACE*

### A. What is a Community Study Circle?

The Community Circle Collaborative process is one way to sample the broadest possible spectrum of opinions within a community. It is also an effective way to generate informed conversations that can lead to new levels of citizenship and civic action. This process has been used all over the country to create a public voice about important issues and to help ensure that that voice is heard by decision-makers. Without the effort to bring people together for informed and civil conversation, the most extreme voices are free to frame the issues. Public-spirited conversation will be drowned out by shrill debate, our communities will become even more polarized, and our common interests and values will get lost in a sea of opposition and conflict. There is a need to create a public voice that recognizes our common interests and generates consensus about, or at least informed consent to, policies and actions designed to further the common good.

Why is this public conversation important? In part, it's because most of what we see today in the media and in public meetings is "positioning" or "posturing" -- that is, highly stylized communication. The purpose of this style is to advocate one point of view or another, at the expense of dialogue and, often, of decorum. Although widely accepted in the media, this type of communication ultimately leads to public cynicism and withdrawal from the political process. Not many people wish to become strident enough to compete in such a contrived forum. Community circles offer a refreshing change from the narrow and often restrictive discussions of the past and the competitive debates encouraged by the political process.

To "converse" means to "share words with others". It carries the implication of equality of opportunity and status, and of the give-and-take of exchange. Conversations, which shares ideas, thoughts and perspectives, are intended to lead to understanding. They help to clear the air by honestly reflecting the differences and similarities among the conversants.

The study circle is a well-tested, practical method for adult learning and social change. In a study circle, 5-20 people meet several times to discuss the various choices the community might make concerning a social or political issue. Complex issues are broken down into manageable pieces, and controversial topics are dealt with in depth. Each discussion lasts about two hours and is directed by a well-prepared discussion leader whose role is to aid in lively but focused discussion. The process is informal, democratic and highly participatory, so that the group can capitalize on the experience of all its members.

*People acting as citizens create new ways of working together and new ways of taking responsibility for what is publicly all of ours. -- Dick Little, Education and Housing Equity Project*

The community circles process recognizes that agreement is not necessary in order for a conversation to be successful. What *are* necessary are listening, reflecting, and speaking from both the head and the heart. Mutual respect and a belief in the enlightening and healing nature of sharing ideas -- across boundaries of ethnicity, geography, age, gender, socioeconomic status and even language -- can go a long way toward making a conversation rewarding for the community as well as the individuals involved. Moreover, they can become vehicles for community problem-solving and development of action coalitions, composed of individual citizens, community organizations, the business community and government, that are better able to effect meaningful change for the better.

In many cultures, circles are symbols of equality, fairness and completeness. The underlying premise of the Community Circles Collaborative process is that solutions to serious and often divisive issues can be found if we put aside our fears and prejudices and work together.

## **B. The Need: Residential and Educational Segregation in the Twin Cities**

The Education and Housing Equity Project (EHEP) was created in early 1995 by a group of education and housing advocates who shared a belief in the pressing need to link the issue of school desegregation with

the broader issue of housing and neighborhood segregation. EHEP's mission is to act as a catalyst to build broad-based coalitions and engage the community in public conversations about and advocacy for promotion of racially and economically inclusive communities that give families of all incomes, races and ethnic backgrounds access to schools and housing throughout the metropolitan area.

*The reason it's critical that we talk is because words have different meanings to different people, and we have different levels of interpretation and reflection from our own experience, our history, our expectations, our own knowledge of where we can go.*  
-- Dr. Josie Johnson

A few alarming facts highlight the nature and depth of the concerns they wished to address:

- The proportion of people of color who live in poverty is higher in Minneapolis/St. Paul than in any other central city in the nation: 37 percent of African-Americans, 40 percent of Native Americans, 32 percent of Latinos.
- Concentrations of poverty and income disparities between the region's central cities and its suburbs are also among the highest in the nation. The poverty rate in Minneapolis is 18.5 percent, in St. Paul 16.7 percent, but in the suburbs it is only 4.5 percent.
- The central cities are home to only 22 percent of the children enrolled in regional schools, but to 55 percent of the region's impoverished elementary school children.
- Between 1970 and 1984, the population of the metro area increased by 9.7 percent but the land it occupied increased by 25.1 percent.

### **C. Chronology of CCC Events**

The Community Circle Colaborative is now more than a year old. A brief chronology of its activities and related events appears below.

**December 1996:** The "Beyond Busing" Kick-Off Forum was held for project sponsors. This event was attended by more than 100 people representing a wide variety of organizations: churches, advocacy groups, academia, public agencies and foundations. Significantly, the event took place in the suburbs (in the St. Louis Park City Council chambers), making it clear from the beginning that this was not a central-city effort but a metro-wide effort. The first two speakers, former St. Paul Mayor George Latimer and education expert Josie Johnson, Ph.D., helped to set the context of the project and to encourage and motivate participants. The two speakers who followed them, Curt Johnson, chair of the Metropolitan Council; and Yusef Mgeni, President of the Urban Coalition, provided information and insights regarding the breadth and depth of segregation problems and costs in the metropolitan area. Following the speakers, individuals representing the state legislature, an outer-ring suburban church, an inner-ring suburban school, a nonprofit housing developer, the media and the Minneapolis Mayor's Office all described why they planned to participate in the project and urged others to join them. As the event concluded, many new sponsors submitted their pledges to participate by organizing study circles.

**February 1997:** Training for study-circle facilitators was held, and the first Discussion Guide for participants was issued.

**March-June 1997:** Study circle discussion groups met 3-5 times each to discuss the two questions given above. Each group produced a brief report summarizing its discussion and findings. Nearly 350 people

participated in these discussions.

**May 1997:** CCC held a Community Forum at Macalester College in St. Paul. This forum was attended by many of the individuals who had participated in study circles and gave them a chance not only to share the results of their deliberations and but also to explore the extent of commonalities among the different groups. The Forum featured Martha McCoy, the Executive Director of the (national) Study Circles Resource Center, whose presentation was followed by two "conversations." The first, moderated by Vivian Jenkins Nelsen, President and CEO of INTER-RACE, focused on the first study-circle question (regarding impacts); the second, moderated by George Latimer, addressed the second question, which focuses on potential solutions. (Section III of this report summarizes the findings of all the study circles.)

**June 1997:** The Institute on Race and Poverty delivers to the McKnight Foundation a report entitled "Examining the Relationship Between Housing, Education, and Persistent Segregation." This report identifies the Twin Cities region as one of the ten most segregated metropolitan regions in the United States.

*The Twin Cities have reached an important time to consider which path it will follow. This community has already begun to creep down the path so familiar to many large urban areas. If the Twin Cities community is to reverse its course, it must begin now. This community must seriously examine and confront what is happening here, and it must come together for real, proven solutions. -- The Institute on Race and Poverty, University of Minnesota*

**July 1997:** All study circle reports were submitted to EHEP. In addition, facilitators and group organizers completed a questionnaire intended to help the study-circle organizers to learn more about the process -- successes as well as difficulties -- and to glean suggestions concerning how better to proceed in the next round of discussions.

**July-October 1997:** Individual participants who represented interested groups made presentations to their respective organizations, local communities and constituencies.

**September 1997:** The National Conference on Race Relations and America's Public Education System takes place. One of the discussion sites is the Twin Cities. Among the practical issues identified are housing segregation, economic inequity, and the need for long-term solutions rather than quick fixes.

**April 1998:** The final report of the first round of study circles, "Beyond Busing: The First Metrowide Dialogue on the Challenges of Education and Housing Segregation," is issued.

### III. Study Circle Reports

#### A. Issues

*We are in very deep denial. We believe we aren't like Detroit, but we are;  
it's just happening more slowly here.*

The necessary first step in trying to solve thorny social problems is to ensure that those problems are understood in much the same way by all. The Community Circles Collaborative therefore focused its study groups' initial attention on issue identification and discussion.

The issues identified by CCC participants fell into four fairly distinct groupings:

- Issues related to regional growth and equity in terms of investment, employment and social relations;
- Systemic issues related to housing segregation and neighborhood quality;
- Systemic issues related to education; and
- Issues that arise primarily at the level of the individual.

A small degree of liberty has been taken to clarify meaning or to combine similar thoughts expressed in different ways by more than one participant or study circle. Every effort has been made, however, to retain the essence of what appeared in the study circle reports.

Issues shown in italic type were identified by more than one study group.

#### 1. *Issues of regional growth and equity*

When asked to determine how many societies the Twin Cities have become, people responded in two different ways. One group suggested that we have become "three societies: The very rich, working people, and the poor." Another described it differently: "Two -- those who work and those who don't." Regardless of how it is said, though, there was a strong recognition among participants that the region has become polarized into distinct, and often mutually distrusting, camps.

The issues that appear in this grouping deal with the broad context of regional equity -- and inequity. They cluster around three topics: investment, employment and social relations.

##### **Investment:**

Spatial mismatch between available fiscal and economic resources and high-order fiscal and social needs -- for example, northern part of region needs more infrastructure

Biases in business lending that shortchange women- and minority-owned businesses

Need for more entrepreneurship programs, e.g., micro-loans, money circles

*Perceived and real disadvantages of central-city sites, due to crime, presence of pollutants and an unskilled workforce*

*A focus on the short-term and the bottom line, disregarding long-standing evidence that a "rising tide" does not lift all boats*

Shortage of businesses that are committed to being good corporate citizens

Growth containment affects provision and cost of infrastructure

*Suburbanites like to have the benefits of the city  
but do not like to pay for them.*

**Employment:**

*Spatial mismatch between available jobs and many of the unemployed -- e.g., the northern part of the region needs to provide more jobs*  
Biases in job hiring and wage-setting practices  
Shortage of reverse-commute options that can take inner-city workers to suburban jobs  
*Shortage of quality affordable child care, especially at "non-traditional" work times*  
Changing workforce demographics: more persons of color, more seniors, more women supporting households  
Challenge presented by people who are physically or psychologically unable to "work a 9-5 job"  
Underrecognition by business that well-trained employees lead to greater profitability  
*Lack of benefits with many part-time and low-wage jobs*  
Jobs accessible to residents of poor communities often go to outsiders  
Lack of sufficient interest in and support for entrepreneurship in minority and poor communities

**Social relations:**

*Distortions and stereotypes in media reporting*  
*Reporting of crime that is disproportionate to its occurrence*  
Need for true justice that is timely, fair and makes wise use of parole and community-service options  
Polarization reinforced by racial categories on government forms  
General breakdown of family structure and cohesion due to economic demands, lifestyle choices, decline in community support  
Perceived need to keep track of people with criminal records (e.g., community right-to-know regulations for known sex offenders)  
Tendency for people to remain close to their support networks  
*Decline in traditional values, especially a decline in personal integrity and responsibility*  
Lack of courage to make wise but unpopular decisions

*Churches can perpetuate values  
but are not always good role models*

**2. Systemic issues related to housing and neighborhoods**

There was a generally high level of consensus on housing and neighborhood issues, which clustered around two topics: housing stock and neighborhood environment. By far the most often-cited issue was that of exclusionary suburban zoning and development practices, which were mentioned specifically by one-fourth of the reporting groups.

*The people who can afford to pay taxes live out in the suburbs,  
and the inner city has been getting poorer and poorer. It will continue  
until there is some massive political determination  
that we're going to make our inner cities the most attractive places to live,  
or at least as attractive for all kinds of people as the suburbs are.*

**Housing:**

- Lack of investment in poor or declining neighborhoods
- Poor housing stock that repels stable families, discourages investment
- Lead-based paint and other health hazards
- Lack of neighborhood diversity in housing types, which leads to homogeneous populations
- Inflexible central-city zoning and other regulations that prohibit use of many vacant/abandoned buildings as shelter*
- Shortage of affordable housing*
- Punitive rental property taxes
- High cost of land
- Poor enforcement of existing fair housing laws
- Lack of awareness of opportunities and options among low-income households

*In Minneapolis, the government is sponsoring the destruction of affordable housing, through zoning, through licensing, through housing codes. The city has destroyed countless affordable neighborhoods.*

**Neighborhood environment:**

- Unequal power in neighborhood/community relations*
- Inadequate resources for general maintenance, including trash pick-up and yardwork
- Lack of resources to facilitate neighborhood involvement
- Transience caused by poor housing stock, low incomes*
- Land-use plans that give highest priority to accommodating cars (e.g., intrusive highway routes)
- Inadequate transit service (frequency, hours, direct routing and choice of destinations)*
- Exclusionary suburban zoning regulations (e.g., minimum lot size and square footage, garage requirements, development fees)*
- Redlining (insurance, lending, cab service, police response)*
- Crime and perceptions of crime*
- Need to improve conditions for those who "remain behind"

*More affluent neighborhoods [have] essentially accepted socioeconomic redlining.*

**3. Systemic issues related to education**

Perspectives on the shortcomings of the educational system were quite diverse but fall into two groupings: One focuses on the in-school experience, the other on the interaction between the school and the surrounding community.

**The school as educational institution:**

- Teachers not living in the community

- Few opportunities to experience diversity
- Institutional discrimination: students receiving differential treatment due to race/color, learning ability, economic status, perceived intelligence, and/or athletic ability, which can lead to artificially raised or lowered expectations
- Focus on short-term results when long-term solutions are needed
- Failure to teach the basics
- Lack of adequate [curriculum] structure
- Classes that are too big
- Inability to sustain children's enthusiasm for school beyond 3rd or 4th grade
- Too few minority teachers
- Insufficient counselors and inadequate counseling
- Schools being asked to do far more than teach academics
- Lack of effective means of dealing with children from problem situations; at-risk children "falling through the cracks"

*Where we do get the minorities to move out into the suburbs, they have the money, they have the wherewithal, but we . . . have a problem in the sensitivity of our teachers and our educational system . . . . One of the biggest problems that [minority kids] are finding is that their teachers are prejudiced. So we move out into the suburbs, and what we encounter are teachers who will not be fair with these kids . . . . They're also scared of being in school, because they're afraid of being called names, and if there's a fight, they get kicked out. So there's a racial imbalance.*

**The school in the community:**

- The school system is not user-friendly or parent-friendly
- Transience disrupting children's stability, ability to learn
- School violence (e.g., children carrying weapons)
- Unequal distribution of school resources, both within and between school districts
- Perception that central-city schools are underfunded
- Special challenges presented by schools impacted by concentrated poverty
- Lack of adequate transportation/transit, which results in reduced access to extra-curricular activities and school choice
- The public-school monopoly -- lack of competition and choice
- Poor nutrition among school children
- Language barriers among recent immigrants
- Under-educated, over-worked parents who cannot adequately help their children
- [Household] stability affects academic achievement
- Need for transitional housing to support schools

*You can't learn  
if you are hungry.*

**4. Issues related to individuals**

These issues reflect more general concerns about the state of our society as a whole as well as the plight of individuals within it. Some of these issues are pandemic -- that is, they plague people in all races, classes and locations; others are more specific to particular circumstances, especially the circumstances of those living in areas of concentrated poverty.

**Society-wide issues:**

*Substance abuse and addiction*  
Breakdown in the institution of marriage  
Lack of recognition for different family types, e.g., extended families  
Lack of self-esteem in children due to inadequate parenting  
*Lack of respect for the rights, beliefs and property of others*  
*Lack of respect for teachers and other elders*  
Fear leading to isolation, high levels of stress  
Negative stereotyping  
Racism  
Denial of racism/segregation problem  
Need for more welcoming in the community

*'The white teachers don't like us.  
When a white kid does something good, they get praised.  
When we do something good, they say nothing.'*

**Issues more common in areas of concentrated poverty:**

Low incomes/joblessness leading to extralegal economic activity  
Poor parental supervision of children and lack of other supportive/responsible adults  
Lack of employed role models  
Individuals focused on day-to-day survival unlikely to make education a top priority  
Unwillingness or inability to take personal responsibility (e.g., in housing: use of illegal subleases and presence of unaccounted-for tenants)  
Lack of pride in surroundings  
High level of mobility leading to instability in family, education  
Inability to set and work toward goals  
Entitlement mentality promoted by welfare dependency  
Victim mentality promoted by discrimination and dependency

*Describing the problems of the inner city as a result of abstract 'racism' is not helpful because fighting 'racism' seems a futile exercise.*

**B. Potential solutions**

*We decided early on that the issues of housing, education and jobs were not mutually exclusive, and that if we had to do anything, we had to do all of them . . . . One of the things we said is that if the economic bottom line drives the process, then a rising economic tide should diminish segregation. But does it?*

The potential solutions that appear here should be regarded as a valuable first cut. As the Community Circles Collaborative proceeds with its second round of discussions, every effort will be made to deepen participants' understanding of the connections among the issues and to help them develop meaningful and effective responses to those issues.

It is also important to remember that many potential solutions are implicit in the issue statements. For example, to address the issue described as “biases in business lending that shortchange women- and minority-owned businesses,” a potential solution might be to work to eliminate those biases, or to find other ways to make more investment capital available to women and minorities. In this sense, the issues lists should not be dismissed as potential sources of ideas.

Again, as was the case with the issues, every attempt has been made to capture the essence of what emerged from the discussants, while also combining and clarifying ideas where appropriate.

*When something isn't working,  
try something new.*

### **1. Employment and opportunity**

Suggestions for increasing employment and economic opportunity generally addressed broad topical categories, such as entrepreneurship and child care.

- Adopt the OxFam approach that sets up micro-loan and revolving credit programs (“money circles”) among groups of inner-city residents. This will help to foster entrepreneurship.
- Increase funding for women- and minority-owned businesses.
- Require basic benefits with all full-time jobs.
- Offer incentives to lenders to make business and home loans to low-income persons.
- Recruit corporations as community partners that can help to provide transportation to job sites, child care, and job offers to center-city residents.
- Improve the transit system by expanding reverse-commute options and using a wider variety of vehicle and service types (e.g., company vans, vanpools, dial-a-ride systems, bus-service rerouting).
- Expand the funding for and availability of adequate child care.

*We found ourselves going back and forth. First, someone would say, well, it's an economic solution we need here, or it's an economic cause of this problem. And then right away someone else would counter with, it's lack of community, it's 'heart' things. What we eventually came up with is that we have to have solutions that are addressed to both sides of the problem, because one or the other isn't going to do it.*

### **2. Societal relations and resources**

Suggestions related to social relations focused on communities of faith and sources of information:

- Partner churches to offer and encourage multi-cultural experiences for their congregations.
- Provide anti-racism training and materials for media staff members.
- Work more through communities of faith and rely more on faith-based programs, which are [often] more successful than comparable secular programs.
- Keep public libraries open for longer hours, especially evenings and weekends.

*Congregations need to move  
'outside the congregational walls.'*

### **3. Housing and neighborhoods**

The most logical breakdown of potential solutions in this category is between housing and neighborhoods.

**Housing:**

- Mix small apartment buildings with other housing types in new developments.
- Allow mixed-use zoning that permits people to live, for example, above stores.
- Increase the flexibility of various codes to assist large families, for example by allowing three persons in each bedroom.
- Increase the number of duplexes and triplexes with resident owners.
- Fund experiments in shared living.
- Expand the supply of transitional housing.
- Experiment with ways to reduce the profit motive vis-a-vis construction and rehabilitation of affordable housing.
- Reinstitute some kind of fair-share housing requirement regionwide.
- Put teeth in the Livable Communities Act and the Community Reinvestment Act.
- Provide better and more consistent code enforcement.
- Increase resources to make landlords accountable for repairs and treatment of tenants.
- Offer more widespread down-payment assistance to persons of limited means.
- Couple household support programs with housing choice and subsidy.
- Test "money circles" as a source of funding for home improvements and other family/household needs.
- Experiment with payment-assistance programs, similar to existing utility-assistance programs

(e.g.,

voluntary payments by utility customers to help those in need).

**Neighborhoods:**

- Pair seniors and young parents so they can get to know one another and exchange services, for example swapping occasional child care for lawn mowing
- Expand and support Neighborhood Watch programs.
- Improve emergency support systems, as well as awareness of and access to them.

*People like to be with  
people like themselves.*

**4. Education**

Ideas for improving public education ran the gamut from those promoting general improvement for all students, regardless of race or socioeconomic status, to those specifically targeting at-risk youngsters from a wide variety of backgrounds. These suggestions fell into several groupings: curriculum and teaching, student support, school choice, recognition of diversity and community relations.

*If we go back to neighborhood schools, poverty areas must have  
the best, strongest teachers.*

**Curriculum and teaching improvements:**

- Teach all students life skills, such as money management, parenting, how to look for a job and how to select appropriate housing.
- Eliminate state curriculum standards except for testing.

Require academic tests at the elementary, middle-junior high and senior high school levels.  
Rate schools on academic achievement.  
Develop different learning tracks, including at least one that provides a good education to those who will not go to [an academic]college.  
Expand work-study opportunities that do not allow teen-agers to work in fast-food places -- for example, home construction/rehabilitation.  
Encourage/recruit corporate sponsorships and internships. Involve businesses in helping students better visualize careers and career paths and learn the skills they will need.  
Educate students for civic participation.  
Require community-service hours, even before high school.  
Equalize school-district spending per child.  
Lengthen both the school day and the school year.

*It is time to leave the premise that everyone is qualified to attend college. It is very important for our country to have mechanics, plumbers, carpenters and others who perform such useful tasks. Dignity is in all work and unfortunately that has been lost.*

**Student support:**

Move away from a “fix the kid” approach to a “fix the system” approach.  
Enhance programs that prevent drop-outs.  
Offer more tutoring.  
Expand mentoring programs.  
Expand after-school activities, especially in the fine and performing arts and other non-athletic program areas.  
Get truants off the streets and into a community center, workplace or community-service setting.  
Require uniforms (although not necessarily “traditional” ones).  
Provide better and more plentiful counseling that is more holistic and incorporates help with chemical abuse.  
Sponsor “burning issues” clubs, lunches or other time to help youngsters deal with issues at home.

*Kids are afraid to go to school because of racism, they're afraid because of sexism, homophobia . . . When they're there, the children are so worried about, am I going to get to my next class, am I going to get home, am I going to get beat up on the way home, am I going to have my lunch money for lunch -- that learning is secondary.*

**School choice:**

Allow children to go to any [public] school they want.  
Support community schools -- “stop busing madness.”  
“Bus for programs, not for numbers.”

*Teachers in the public school system are very unprepared for kids of color. Training needs to address not only multiculturalism but it needs to address some of the factors of poverty and how they impact on kids. They need to look at learning styles. They need to look at how they as teachers can facilitate involvement by parents*

*and community members.*

**Diversity:**

Fund learning opportunities that bring together or pair students from divergent backgrounds.  
Use instruction and programs focused on the environment and ecology to bring together all groups

in the community in a common concern and in common enterprise.

Train teachers in cultural competency.

Imbue the curriculum with diversity, rather than making diversity a “special event” or giving it superficial treatment.

Offer scholarships to students of color who agree to come back and teach for a minimum period of time.

**Community relations:**

Experiment with “peer parent” and buddy programs that help newcomers feel less isolated and become more involved in their children’s schools.

Strengthen the non-educational/pre-school support system that helps to relieve problems in the schools, which consists of programs like Head Start, parenting education, mentoring, quality child care and non-school recreation.

Incorporate community facilities, such as community centers, social service centers and health-care facilities, within or adjacent to schools to give everyone a “stake” in the success of those schools.

*I remember when there were three black teachers in the Minneapolis public schools.  
And yet there were students of color that were going through that school system,  
combating racism as individuals, and going on to become successful participants in society.  
We can blame a lot of things on racism, but let's not fall into the trap of using that  
as an excuse for a lack of achievement.*

## IV. Preparing for the Future

*I think a lot of white people believe, but sometimes don't feel that we can say it, that racism is probably a relatively minor cause of the relatively poor performance of minority kids . . . . It would be incredibly naive to discount the impact of racism on minority kids in our schools, but it seems to me far more significant causes are the breakdown of the African-American family and the lack of role models for young kids. And the sports culture I think is even more important than racism, the idolization of athletes, and the belief that African-American boys in the Minneapolis public schools have -- something like 85 percent feel they can have careers in professional sports . . . . But we don't ever talk about any of those other issues.*

A deeper look at the output of the study circles offers mostly good news: An important and meaningful dialogue has begun, all across the Twin Cities, and people of good will from all backgrounds are thinking about economic and racial disparities with an intensity not seen since the 1960s. Most of the participants grasp the gravity of the issues, understand at least in part their nature and connections to one another, and the necessity for action rather than passive acceptance.

Moreover, the dialogue has begun by generating a profile of many of the important issues. The Study Circle Reports (Section III of this report) contain a wealth of information, insights and ideas that can be used to propel further exploration of the role of race, changing economics and spatial segregation on housing and education throughout the region.

Having said that, though, it is worth taking a more critical look at the study circle output, and at the process itself, as a means of preparing the ground for another round of conversations. This section of the report is divided into two parts; the first focuses on issues of substance, both present and future, and the second focuses on issues of process.

### A. Issues of Substance

One striking feature of the lists of issues is the virtually total absence of comments about gangs -- in spite of stories in the Minneapolis *Star-Tribune* and elsewhere relating gang activities to the recent upsurge in violent crime, particularly homicides. Perhaps more than any other event, the proliferation and expansion of gangs has contributed substantially to region-wide fears of violent crime. Although "violence in the schools" was mentioned, it was not connected to a broader recognition of the role of gangs in spreading fear in city neighborhoods and institutions.

Another minor shortcoming of the study-circles process is its failure to systematically explore causal connections. As a result, the study circles tended to produce, on the one hand, a litany of problems that is not prioritized, and, on the other hand, a litany of solutions that may be only haphazardly connected and responsive to the identified problems.

Nonetheless, several cause-and-effect relationships were noted by participants or by experts working with them. For example, one participant noted that solving problems of inequity would require a two-pronged attack: one directed at economics (for example, job training, adequate transportation and center-city investment) and the other directed at community (housing, public education and taxes). This approach recognizes that housing and educational segregation cannot be considered in a vacuum, but are affected by family incomes and community context. Similarly, the police chief of St. Louis Park noted that, based on the relatively high percentage of arrests that involve people of color, a great deal of racial "profiling" has taken place. Yet he was quick to add that the majority of such crimes are in fact crimes of *poverty*.

*Although the world has become a global village,  
whites are not ready to accept us even though we are equally qualified . . . .  
I think we should start a program where you interact  
with us and get to know us a little better . . . .  
Racism is alive.*

Unhappily, race and poverty too often go hand in hand in our society. As Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton said in their landmark book *American Apartheid*,

Most Americans vaguely realize that urban America is still a residentially segregated society, but few appreciate the depth of black segregation or the degree to which it is maintained by ongoing institutional arrangements and contemporary individual actions. . . . Residential segregation is not a neutral fact; it systematically undermines the social and economic well-being of blacks . . . [creating] a social environment where poverty and joblessness are the norm . . . (1993: 1-2).

Along the same lines, William Julius Wilson has said:

[T]he wage and employment gap between skilled and unskilled workers is growing partly because education and training are considered more important than ever in the new global economy. At the same time that changes in technology are producing new jobs, they are making many others obsolete. . . . More routine workers face the growing threat of job displacement. . . . The shift in demand has been especially devastating for those low-skilled workers whose incorporation into the mainstream economy has been marginal or recent. Even before the economic restructuring of the nation's economy, low-skilled African-Americans were at the end of the employment queue. Their economic situation has been further weakened because they tend to reside in communities that not only have higher jobless rates and lower employment growth but lack access to areas of higher employment and employment growth as well.

-- William Julius Wilson, *When Work Disappears*, 1996: 28-29

*We know that poverty isn't going anywhere, and racism isn't dead.*  
-- Vivian Jenkins Nelson, INTER-RACE

*A lot of times the white culture accepts this one particular way of looking at life,  
this very linear, Western type of norms and values, and they think that's reality . . . .  
Imagine they see a horse and a moose. They don't say, 'Oh, that's a moose,'  
they say, 'Oh, that's a bad horse.' We need to not have this invisible centering on  
the white and everybody else is 'other,' who is sort of a failed white.*

There may be more agreement on the pernicious effects of economic disparity than on those of race and

discrimination. For example, one suburban group reported that "our circle cited 'institutional racism' as a myth created by many." This group did "not feel that race is a large issue. People are people, no matter what color or culture they are." One school worker remarked that "I don't see racism in the schools. I think there is a generous feeling of people trying. Maybe not always succeeding, but trying."

On the other hand, these remarks hint at what Curt Johnson calls the insidious nature of discrimination in Northern cities. At the "Beyond Busing" forum, he quoted from a letter received from an African-American friend upon his return to Houston after living in the Twin Cities for three years: "I left because of the racism . . . At least in the South, I could see the knife. In Minnesota, I didn't find the blood until I got home. It was so subtle, and I didn't realize until later and began to add it up . . ."

Some connections between minority status, joblessness, educational opportunity and community decay do appear in the summaries of study-circle discussions. However, the fact that they are not clearly stated or explored suggests either (1) that few participants truly understand these relationships, or (2) that participants take them so for granted that they are no longer seen as salient.

This situation is further illustrated by two types of responses that, although not commonplace, view the region through ideological or unfocused lenses. One type essentially rejects all interventions intended to reduce segregation and income disparity: Since government has failed, everything associated with it should go. We should repeal taxes, end the prohibition on drugs, repeal labor laws and occupational licensing regulations, end the public-school monopoly, and rigidly separate business and state.

A second type of response takes the form of broad goal statements that move us no closer to real solutions:

- Limit growth and sprawl.
- Revitalize the urban core.
- Organize people at the grassroots level.
- Build partnerships among business, government and the community.
- Improve housing in the inner city.
- Develop a better public transportation system.

In a few cases, participants focused on "what we can do" without identifying the purpose in doing it -- for example, they said they would "meet with the mayor and the Board of Education," but did not say why.

In short, many of the findings of the study circles cover the surface of the issues but do not probe very deeply. Suggested solutions are uneven in character, time frame, comprehensiveness, relevance and practicality. Moreover, there was as much emphasis on problems that plague everyone, particularly in the realm of public education, as upon problems closely associated with racial and economic segregation.

However, none of this is unexpected in the first round of a citizen effort of this type. Although the effort to develop solutions in the last round of discussions was necessary to give participants a sense of achievement and closure, it was premature in the sense that few people were ready intellectually and emotionally to propose truly innovative or meaningful solutions instead of reiterating "proven" ideas that may have little effect on the identified issues. This, too, is not unexpected: If housing desegregation were easy, it would have been achieved already.

### **Guidelines for Future Circles**

- A packet of short readings should be sent to all prospective participants. Some should re-emphasize regional problems, while others might highlight programs and initiatives being undertaken elsewhere in the country. This may be supplemented by a reading list for those who want to explore further.

Suggestions for this list:

Wilson, William Julius. 1987. *The Truly Disadvantaged*. One of the contemporary classics, this book links racial segregation and economic disadvantage in creative new ways. Wilson, almost single-handedly, reopened a debate that had been closed off for nearly twenty years.

Wilson, William Julius. 1996. *When Work Disappears*. Wilson's follow-up presents data, extracts from interviews with inner-city residents, and policy suggestions.

Massey, Douglas and Nancy Denton. 1993. *American Apartheid*. Another classic, this book takes issue with some of Wilson's conclusions and uses an impressive array of statistics to do so. An outstanding primer on the legacy of segregation.

Orfield, Myron. 1997. *Metropolitcs*. An alarming look at change in the Twin Cities region, which also

gives a sense of what can be done at the state level to combat and channel that change.

Sapphire. 1996. *Push*. A first-person account of the life of an inner-city teenager; this book offers a realistic inside look at the challenges of growing up in urban America.

Downs, Anthony. 1973. *Opening Up the Suburbs*. Perhaps the seminal work in this series, it offers some ideas that are as fresh today as they were a generation ago.

Barnett, Jonathan. 1996. *The Fractured Metropolis*. An urban designer's look at what can be done to heal the fractures in our society.

American Planning Association. 1994. *Planning and Community Equity*. A collection of articles addressing the full range of equity issues: affordable housing, transportation, environmental degradation, social impacts, governance, capital investment and citizen participation.

- Focus discussions more tightly. The initial study questions were pretty broad and left a lot of room for interpretation without a lot of direction. Four or five more focused questions would help to structure the dialogue and produce more focused results as well. One question could be used for each study-circle meeting in the next series. Each question could look at a topical study area, perhaps in terms of specific linkages, e.g., economic opportunity and education, economic opportunity and community support (child care, transportation, etc.), affordable housing and desegregation/ deconcentration, public schools and the community, race relations, etc. Each study circle could be given the option of choosing the questions it addresses from a more comprehensive list.

## **B. Issues of Process**

The study-circle process proved its value through not only the output of the discussions but the responses of most participants, who viewed it as a valuable experience they would like to continue or repeat. This occurred even though the process suffered from some initial organizational difficulties. Delays in getting the circles up and running, and in producing and finalizing participant materials, caused some frustration among coordinators, facilitators and participants alike. Scheduling meeting times seems to have been a problem for nearly every circle. In spite of these circumstances, however, there seems to be a general sense that the process was worthwhile, and productive as well.

Creating meaningful change is more art than science. Most organizations that undertake such change fall short of their initial goals. This should not be viewed as "failure." Rather, it should be treated as an invaluable learning experience that could not be gained in any other way -- an experience that should energize and shape ongoing efforts.

Three specific process-related issues arose as a result of the first round of study circles. The first issue relates to group diversity, the second to group facilitation, and the third to group scheduling. These issues are addressed below.

*What you're doing is not a nice thing. . . .  
What you want people to say is not that it is a nice thing to do  
but that's an absolutely necessary thing to do.  
-- Martha McCoy, Study Circles Resource Center.*

### **Improving Diversity**

**Race and ethnicity:** The full group of participants (350+) was fairly representative of the Twin Cities community as a whole in terms of race/ethnicity. However, individual groups did not reflect this diversity. As a result, some participants perceived that the process was not representative. A number of comments were made regarding how "the right people aren't here."

Several methods of improving racial and ethnic diversity might be used. One would be to invite the participation of secular service clubs and congregations that are known to appeal to members of particular groups. Another would be to pair congregations and other sponsoring organizations to promote racial and ethnic intermingling. A third would involve deliberately assigning volunteers of one heritage to join a discussion group dominated by another. Because it is safe to presume that the vast majority of participants are persons of good will and intent, finding volunteers willing to cross barriers should not be difficult. (Besides, isn't that the whole point of this exercise -- crossing barriers?)

**Gender:** The group of participants as a whole was not well-balanced by gender. Men made up only about one-fourth of the participants. The all-female memberships of a couple of study circles even remarked on the absence of male counterparts and asked what could be done to "get the men here."

Although gender imbalance is not uncommon for a volunteer group of this type, gender imbalance needs to be addressed in the next round of circles. One possible approach would be to specifically invite participation by the men's groups from various sponsoring faith communities. Another would be to invite participation by business owners and managers, who -- for better or worse -- are still predominately male.

*It's important to get the advantaged to understand how they're affected  
by [the] plight of low-income minorities.*

### **Improving Group Facilitation**

Good facilitation is the key to good results. The reports from the circles, and the surveys completed by the facilitators themselves, suggest that the quality of facilitation was uneven. This is one of the potential pitfalls of using volunteers, but it need not be a fatal one.

EHEP could turn to professional facilitators to conduct the next round of meetings, but this is not necessary nor even particularly wise. What is needed is better training and support for volunteer facilitators. For example, at least one facilitator complained that the group he or she led frequently strayed from the topic -- without any apparent understanding that it is the job of the facilitator to keep the group focused and moving so it can produce the results it wants within the allotted time.

The facilitator training process and packet reflect this failure to teach the basics. Training emphasized the content of the sessions and cultural considerations -- both critical topics, to be sure, but not to the

exclusion of learning how to lead a productive meeting, keep the group focused, mediate conflict, and handle difficult people ("difficult" here referring to any number of problems, including glibness, silence, stonewalling, attempts to dominate, etc.).

Given that some of the facilitators are relatively inexperienced, having a monitor present to step in and redirect the group's energy can be invaluable. A monitor can keep an eye on several groups at a time and keep tabs on the clock as well. The monitor's presence allows each facilitator to engage fully in the group's discussion and ensure that both substance and direction remain relevant. Moreover, should any facilitator encounter difficulty with a particular group -- belligerence, refusal to focus, etc. -- someone else is present to mediate and help the group get moving in positive ways again. The presence of a monitor can aid neophyte and experienced facilitators alike.

In CCC's case, the difficulties in using monitors are logistical: If each group is meeting at its own place and time, it is simply infeasible for a single monitor to be present. Neither would this be an efficient use of anyone's time. Moreover, the number of monitors available will necessarily be limited by the need for each one to be highly experienced in facilitation and/or team leadership. These difficulties could be overcome through a different approach to scheduling discussions.

### **Improving Study-Circle Scheduling**

Ironically, it is possible that individual groups were given *too much* latitude in scheduling their own meetings -- which means that each person's dentist appointment, TV viewing habits, softball league, family demands, vacation and other prior commitments interfered with circle meetings. Multiply this effect by ten or fifteen circle members, and it becomes clear why scheduling was a problem.

Rather than leaving the scheduling decision wide open, it may be more effective to set up group meeting times in advance. For example, meetings in each round of discussions could be slated to take place at one of four or five predetermined times at one of four or five predetermined locations. Discussants would be asked to select one of those times and places to participate, either for the entire series or on a meeting-by-meeting basis. Advance sign-ups would probably be necessary in order to make sure that all time slots have enough participants; otherwise, intended participants would have to be notified of a change in plans.

Although this approach might entail some additional work on the part of the organizers, it might also eliminate some work by eliminating confusion about who is meeting where, and when. Moreover, sponsoring organizations would remain heavily involved in coordinating meetings and keeping track of participants.

Adopting an approach similar to this one could produce several benefits:

- It would impose some discipline on the groups and indicate that the study circles are not a social event that takes place only when everyone is free, but a formalized process with demands of its own.
- It would allow coordinators to balance the sizes of the circles, eliminating problems caused by poor attendance in some groups while others overflow.
- It would allow individuals who might miss one set time to "make up" a session at a different time, thus facilitating participation in the entire series of discussions.
- It would allow individuals to sample different locations, if desired, thus exposing them to a much wider range of viewpoints and ideas.
- It would enable the circle coordinators at any given location to balance racial and gender representation more effectively, either by pairing sponsoring organizations or by randomly assigning incoming individuals to different discussion groups.
- It would allow for the efficient use of monitors in support of facilitators.

- It would put everyone on essentially the same timetable, with a clear beginning and a clear end.

One potential drawback to this approach is that some groups would lose the continuity and, hence, the familiarity that foster trust and openness. However, the process itself can help to encourage such openness. Moreover, most discussion groups will probably remain essentially intact throughout the entire series due to individual choices.

## **V. Plans for the Future**

## **VI. Appendices**

- A. Background on EHEP, CCC
- B. Findings of facilitator questionnaire
- C. List of sponsors and participants

## **The Choices for Community Project A Report on the First Round of Community Circles**

“We need to develop a regional civics that is not about governmental entities. It’s about citizens, community groups, businesses, and government agencies coming together to act in the common interest of the region.”

– William Barnes, coauthor of *The U.S. Common Market*

### **I. Executive Summary: Principal Findings and Directions for the Future**

A great experiment in democracy is underway in Minneapolis/St. Paul. Since December 1996, over 350 residents of the Twin Cities metropolitan area have been involved in the Choices for Community program, the first effort of its kind to bring citizens of an entire *region* together to deliberate on difficult regional issues. The program is being organized by the Community Circle Collaborative, a cross-sector coalition of over 30 Twin Cities organizations.

In their Community Circles – small, participatory, democratic discussions – citizens addressed issues surrounding educational and residential segregation. Participants shared their hopes, concerns, and recommendations at a Community Forum held in May 1997.

This fall, another round of Community Circles will begin. The program’s organizers and sponsoring organizations are determined to bring many more people into these vital discussions. Based on findings from the first round, the program will also facilitate more opportunities for participants to join in implementing the solutions they develop. With the foundation laid in the first year, the second will become a greater springboard for action at the neighborhood and community levels.

## II. Background: The Community Circle Collaborative

*"It couldn't happen here." Not in Minneapolis-St. Paul, the political home of Hubert Humphrey: Minnesota, America's sane heartland. . . . The Twin Cities was immune to urban decline, inner-suburban decay, urban sprawl – and the polarization that has devastated and divided older, larger regions. After all, we were not Chicago, Detroit, or Milwaukee. We were reform minded, and our philanthropic and governmental centers were coordinated and responsive. Then the 1980s hit, marking our Twin Cities with identical patterns of regional polarization. . . . If it could happen here, no American region is immune. Once polarization occurs, the concentration of poverty, disinvestment, middle-class flight, and urban sprawl grow more and more severe.*

*-- Myron Orfield, Metropolitcs (1997: 1, emphasis added)*

State Legislator Myron Orfield was one of the first citizens in the region to realize that Twin Cities communities were becoming increasingly polarized along the lines of race and class. Changes in regional school districts pointed to serious issues of equity in both housing access and public education.

It is within this context that the Community Circle Collaborative (CCC) was launched. CCC is a metro-wide dialogue project that engages citizens from all walks of life, 8-12 at a time, in study circles held throughout the metro area. Originally a partnership among EHEP, the Minneapolis Initiative Against Racism (MIAR), the Minnesota Minority Education Partnership (MMEP), and the Minnesota Fair Housing Center, the CCC initiative has expanded into a wide-ranging coalition of community-based organizations, public staff and officials, and individuals working in a variety of fields, including social justice, race relations, housing, education, religion, law and social research.

The Collaborative's members were united by their interest in two central questions:

- What are the impacts of existing patterns of residential, economic and racial segregation on the educational achievement and life opportunities of Twin Cities area children and families?
- What can or should we do, as individuals and as a community, to enhance educational success and housing and economic opportunities for *all* children in the Twin Cities area?

*The diversity in our state is greatest among children . . . . So this is a long curve. We'd better start getting some of the answers right now, because they're going to affect an entire generation.*

*– Vivian Jenkins Nelsen, INTER-RACE*

### A. What is a Community Circle?

The Community Circle process is one way help a community achieve new levels of citizenship and civic action. Large-scale Choices for Community programs – often referred to as study circle programs – have been used all over the country to generate reasoned dialogue, decisive policy input, and grass-roots problem-solving.

The impacts of these programs range from new friendships, to neighborhood projects, to city-wide action plans, to new legislation. An evaluation of a study circle program in Greater Cleveland showed basic

changes in attitude as a result of the study circles. Study circle participants in Lima, Ohio have done everything from building new playgrounds to changing the makeup of a regional development board. A state-wide study circle program in Oklahoma helped the state legislature enact sweeping changes in the criminal system.

Community circles, or study circles, are democratic, highly participatory discussion groups which meet several times to address a critical public issue. The discussions are facilitated, and they follow a framework laid out in a discussion guide specific to that issue. The participants talk about how the issue affects them, then consider some of the larger questions surrounding the issue, and, finally, discuss how they might take action on the issue. Successful organizers have been able to mobilize large numbers of citizens – a “community-wide” program in a medium-sized city can involve roughly 1,000 people in 75-100 circles.

While community-wide study circle programs have taken place in many cities and towns, and state-wide study circle programs have taken place in Maine and Oklahoma, the Twin Cities Community Circles project is the first attempt at a region-wide program. With the ascendance of regional issues such as segregation, urban sprawl, and transportation to the forefront of policy debates across the nation, a region-wide model is a much-needed innovation.

*We face our greatest challenges at the neighborhood, regional, and global levels. Our governments are structured to address challenges at the local, state, and national levels.*  
– William Dodge, *Regional Excellence*

Why are these public conversations so unusual? In part, it’s because most of what we see today in the media and in public meetings is “positioning” or “posturing.” The purpose of this style is to advocate one point of view or another, at the expense of dialogue and, often, of decorum. Although widely accepted in the media, this type of communication ultimately leads to public cynicism and withdrawal from the political process. Not many people want to compete in such a contrived forum. Community circles offer a refreshing change from the narrow and often restrictive discussions of the past and the competitive debates encouraged by the political process.

*People acting as citizens create new ways of working together and new ways of taking responsibility for what is publicly all of ours.*  
– Dick Little, Education and Housing Equity Project

The community circles process recognizes that agreement is not necessary in order for a conversation to be successful. It *is* necessary for participants to listen, reflect, and speak from both the head and the heart. Mutual respect and a belief in the enlightening and healing nature of sharing ideas – across boundaries of ethnicity, geography, age, gender, socioeconomic status and even language – can go a long way toward making a conversation rewarding for the community as well as the individuals involved.

In many cultures, circles are symbols of equality, fairness and completeness. The underlying premise of the Community Circles Collaborative process is that solutions to serious and often divisive issues can be found if we put aside our fears and prejudices and work together.

## **B. The Need: Residential and Educational Segregation in the Twin Cities**

The Education and Housing Equity Project (EHEP), the [lead?] partner in the Community Circle Collaborative, was created in early 1995 by a group of education and housing advocates who shared a belief in the pressing need to link the issue of school desegregation with the broader issue of housing and neighborhood segregation. EHEP's mission is to act as a catalyst to build broad-based coalitions and engage the community in public conversations about and advocacy for promotion of racially and economically inclusive communities that give families of all incomes, races and ethnic backgrounds access to schools and housing throughout the metropolitan area.

*The reason it's critical that we talk is because words have different meanings to different people, and we have different levels of interpretation and reflection from our own experience, our history, our expectations, our own knowledge of where we can go.*

– Dr. Josie Johnson

A few alarming facts highlight the nature and depth of the concerns they wished to address:

- The proportion of people of color who live in poverty is higher in Minneapolis/St. Paul than in any other central city in the nation: 37 percent of African-Americans, 40 percent of Native Americans, 32 percent of Latinos.
- Concentrations of poverty and income disparities between the region's central cities and its suburbs are also among the highest in the nation. The poverty rate in Minneapolis is 18.5 percent, in St. Paul 16.7 percent, but in the suburbs it is only 4.5 percent.
- The central cities are home to only 22 percent of the children enrolled in regional schools, but to 55 percent of the region's impoverished elementary school children.
- Between 1970 and 1984, the population of the metro area increased by 9.7 percent but the land it occupied increased by 25.1 percent.

The organizations which have joined the Community Circle Collaborative may have widely-diverging views about how to solve these problems. However, all of the partners share a common concern about the issue of segregation, and a commitment that residents of the Twin Cities region must be actively engaged in addressing it.

*We know that poverty isn't going anywhere, and racism isn't dead.*

– Vivian Jenkins Nelsen, INTER-RACE

### **C. Chronology of CCC Events**

The Community Circle Collaborative is now more than a year old. A brief chronology of its activities and related events appears below.

**December 1996:** The "Beyond Busing" Kick-Off Forum was held for project sponsors. This event was attended by more than 100 people representing a wide variety of organizations: churches, advocacy groups, academia, public agencies and foundations. Significantly, the event took place in the suburbs (in the St. Louis Park City Council chambers), making it clear from the beginning that this was not a central-city effort but a metro-wide effort. The first two speakers, former St. Paul Mayor George Latimer and

education expert Josie Johnson, Ph.D., helped to set the context of the project and to encourage and motivate participants. The two speakers who followed them, Curt Johnson, chair of the Metropolitan Council; and Yusef Mgeni, President of the Urban Coalition, provided information and insights regarding the breadth and depth of segregation problems and costs in the metropolitan area. Following the speakers, individuals representing the state legislature, an outer-ring suburban church, an inner-ring suburban school, a nonprofit housing developer, the media and the Minneapolis Mayor's Office all described why they planned to participate in the project and urged others to join them. As the event concluded, many new sponsors submitted their pledges to participate by organizing study circles.

**February 1997:** Training for study-circle facilitators was held, and the first Discussion Guide for participants was issued.

**March-June 1997:** Study circle discussion groups met 3-5 times each to discuss the two questions given above. Each group produced a brief report summarizing its discussion and findings. Nearly 350 people participated in these discussions.

**May 1997:** CCC held a Community Forum at Macalester College in St. Paul. This forum was attended by many of the individuals who had participated in study circles and gave them a chance not only to share the results of their deliberations and but also to explore the extent of commonalities among the different groups. The Forum featured Martha McCoy, the Executive Director of the (national) Study Circles Resource Center, whose presentation was followed by two "conversations." The first, moderated by Vivian Jenkins Nelsen, President and CEO of INTER-RACE, focused on the first study-circle question (regarding impacts); the second, moderated by George Latimer, addressed the second question, which focuses on potential solutions. (Section III of this report summarizes the findings of all the study circles.)

**June 1997:** The Institute on Race and Poverty delivers to the McKnight Foundation a report entitled "Examining the Relationship Between Housing, Education, and Persistent Segregation." This report identifies the Twin Cities region as one of the ten most segregated metropolitan regions in the United States.

*The Twin Cities have reached an important time to consider which path it will follow. This community has already begun to creep down the path so familiar to many large urban areas. If the Twin Cities community is to reverse its course, it must begin now. This community must seriously examine and confront what is happening here, and it must come together for real, proven solutions.*

– The Institute on Race and Poverty, University of Minnesota

**July 1997:** All study circle reports were submitted to EHEP. In addition, facilitators and group organizers completed a questionnaire intended to help the study-circle organizers to learn more about the process – successes as well as difficulties – and to glean suggestions concerning how better to proceed in the next round of discussions.

**July-October 1997:** Individual participants who represented interested groups made presentations to their respective organizations, local communities and constituencies.

**September 1997:** The National Conference on Race Relations and America's Public Education System takes place. One of the discussion sites is the Twin Cities. Among the practical issues identified are

housing segregation, economic inequity, and the need for long-term solutions rather than quick fixes.

***April 1998:*** The final report of the first round of study circles, "Beyond Busing: The First Metrowide Dialogue on the Challenges of Education and Housing Segregation," is issued.

### III. Study Circle Reports

#### A. Issues

*We are in very deep denial. We believe we aren't like Detroit, but we are;  
it's just happening more slowly here.*

– a community circle participant

The necessary first step in trying to solve thorny social problems is to ensure that those problems are understood in much the same way by all. Therefore, the Community Circles focused their attention first on identifying the issues.

The problem areas identified by CCC participants fell into four fairly distinct groupings:

- Issues related to regional growth and equity in terms of investment, employment and social relations;
- Systemic issues related to housing segregation and neighborhood quality;
- Systemic issues related to education; and
- Issues that arise primarily at the level of the individual.

A small degree of liberty has been taken to clarify meaning or to combine similar thoughts expressed in different ways by more than one participant or study circle. Every effort has been made, however, to retain the essence of what appeared in the study circle reports.

Issues shown in italic type were identified by more than one study group.

#### 1. *Issues of regional growth and equity*

When asked to determine how many societies the Twin Cities have become, people responded in two different ways. One group suggested that we have become “three societies: The very rich, working people, and the poor.” Another described it differently: “Two – those who work and those who don't.” Regardless of how it is said, though, there was a strong recognition among participants that the region has become polarized into distinct, and often mutually distrusting, camps.

The issues that appear in this grouping deal with the broad context of regional equity – and inequity. They cluster around three topics: investment, employment and social relations.

##### **Investment:**

Spatial mismatch between available fiscal and economic resources and high-order fiscal and social needs – for example, northern part of region needs more infrastructure

Biases in business lending that shortchange women- and minority-owned businesses

Need for more entrepreneurship programs, e.g., micro-loans, money circles

*Perceived and real disadvantages of central-city sites, due to crime, presence of pollutants and an unskilled workforce*

*A focus on the short-term and the bottom line, disregarding long-standing evidence that a “rising tide” does not lift all boats*

Shortage of businesses that are committed to being good corporate citizens

Growth containment affects provision and cost of infrastructure

*Suburbanites like to have the benefits of the city but do not like to pay for them.*  
– a community circle participant

**Employment:**

*Spatial mismatch between available jobs and many of the unemployed – e.g., the northern part of the region needs to provide more jobs*  
Biases in job hiring and wage-setting practices  
Shortage of reverse-commute options that can take inner-city workers to suburban jobs  
*Shortage of quality affordable child care, especially at “non-traditional” work times*  
Changing workforce demographics: more persons of color, more seniors, more women supporting households  
Challenge presented by people who are physically or psychologically unable to “work a 9-5 job”  
Under-recognition by business that well-trained employees lead to greater profitability  
*Lack of benefits with many part-time and low-wage jobs*  
Jobs accessible to residents of poor communities often go to outsiders  
Lack of sufficient interest in and support for entrepreneurship in minority and poor communities

**Social relations:**

*Distortions and stereotypes in media reporting*  
*Reporting of crime that is disproportionate to its occurrence*  
Need for true justice that is timely, fair and makes wise use of parole and community-service options  
Polarization reinforced by racial categories on government forms  
General breakdown of family structure and cohesion due to economic demands, lifestyle choices, decline in community support  
Perceived need to keep track of people with criminal records (e.g., community right-to-know regulations for known sex offenders)  
Tendency for people to remain close to their support networks  
*Decline in traditional values, especially a decline in personal integrity and responsibility*  
Lack of courage to make wise but unpopular decisions

*Churches can perpetuate values but are not always good role models.*  
– a community circle participant

**2. Systemic issues related to housing and neighborhoods**

There was a generally high level of consensus on housing and neighborhood issues, which clustered around two topics: housing stock and neighborhood environment. By far the most often-cited issue was that of exclusionary suburban zoning and development practices, which were mentioned specifically by one-fourth of the reporting groups.

*The people who can afford to pay taxes live out in the suburbs,  
and the inner city has been getting poorer and poorer. It will continue  
until there is some massive political determination*

*that we're going to make our inner cities the most attractive places to live, or at least as attractive for all kinds of people as the suburbs are.*

– a community circle participant

**Housing:**

- Lack of investment in poor or declining neighborhoods
- Poor housing stock that repels stable families, discourages investment
- Lead-based paint and other health hazards
- Lack of neighborhood diversity in housing types, which leads to homogeneous populations
- Inflexible central-city zoning and other regulations that prohibit use of many vacant/ abandoned buildings as shelter*
- Shortage of affordable housing*
- Punitive rental property taxes
- High cost of land
- Poor enforcement of existing fair housing laws
- Lack of awareness of opportunities and options among low-income households

*In Minneapolis, the government is sponsoring the destruction of affordable housing, through zoning, through licensing, through housing codes. The city has destroyed countless affordable neighborhoods.*

– a community circle participant

**Neighborhood environment:**

- Unequal power in neighborhood/community relations*
- Inadequate resources for general maintenance, including trash pick-up and yardwork
- Lack of resources to facilitate neighborhood involvement
- Transience caused by poor housing stock, low incomes*
- Land-use plans that give highest priority to accommodating cars (e.g., intrusive highway routes)
- Inadequate transit service (frequency, hours, direct routing and choice of destinations)*
- Exclusionary suburban zoning regulations (e.g., minimum lot size and square footage, garage requirements, development fees)*
- Redlining (insurance, lending, cab service, police response)*
- Crime and perceptions of crime*
- Need to improve conditions for those who “remain behind”

*More affluent neighborhoods [have] essentially accepted socioeconomic redlining.*

– a community circle participant

**3. Systemic issues related to education**

Perspectives on the shortcomings of the educational system were quite diverse but fall into two groupings: One focuses on the in-school experience, the other on the interaction between the school and the surrounding community.

**The school as educational institution:**

- Teachers not living in the community

- Few opportunities to experience diversity
- Institutional discrimination: students receiving differential treatment due to race/color, learning ability, economic status, perceived intelligence, and/or athletic ability, which can lead to artificially raised or lowered expectations
- Focus on short-term results when long-term solutions are needed
- Failure to teach the basics
- Lack of adequate [curriculum] structure
- Classes that are too big
- Inability to sustain children's enthusiasm for school beyond 3rd or 4th grade
- Too few minority teachers
- Insufficient counselors and inadequate counseling
- Schools being asked to do far more than teach academics
- Lack of effective means of dealing with children from problem situations; at-risk children "falling through the cracks"

*Where we do get the minorities to move out into the suburbs, they have the money, they have the wherewithal, but we . . . have a problem in the sensitivity of our teachers and our educational system . . . One of the biggest problems that [minority kids] are finding is that their teachers are prejudiced. So we move out into the suburbs, and what we encounter are teachers who will not be fair with these kids . . . They're also scared of being in school, because they're afraid of being called names, and if there's a fight, they get kicked out. So there's a racial imbalance.*

– a community circle participant

**The school in the community:**

- The school system is not user-friendly or parent-friendly
- Transience disrupting children's stability, ability to learn
- School violence (e.g., children carrying weapons)
- Unequal distribution of school resources, both within and between school districts
- Perception that central-city schools are underfunded
- Special challenges presented by schools impacted by concentrated poverty
- Lack of adequate transportation/transit, which results in reduced access to extra-curricular activities and school choice
- The public-school monopoly – lack of competition and choice
- Poor nutrition among school children
- Language barriers among recent immigrants
- Under-educated, over-worked parents who cannot adequately help their children
- [Household] stability affects academic achievement
- Need for transitional housing to support schools

*You can't learn if you are hungry.*

– a community circle participant

**4. Issues related to individuals**

These issues reflect more general concerns about the state of our society as a whole as well as the plight of individuals within it. Some of these issues are pandemic – that is, they plague people in all races,

classes and locations; others are more specific to particular circumstances, especially the circumstances of those living in areas of concentrated poverty.

**Society-wide issues:**

- Substance abuse and addiction*
- Breakdown in the institution of marriage
- Lack of recognition for different family types, e.g., extended families
- Lack of self-esteem in children due to inadequate parenting
- Lack of respect for the rights, beliefs and property of others*
- Lack of respect for teachers and other elders*
- Fear leading to isolation, high levels of stress
- Negative stereotyping
- Racism
- Denial of racism/segregation problem
- Need for more welcoming in the community

*The white teachers don't like us.  
When a white kid does something good, they get praised.  
When we do something good, they say nothing.*

– a community circle participant

**Issues more common in areas of concentrated poverty:**

- Low incomes/joblessness leading to extralegal economic activity
- Poor parental supervision of children and lack of other supportive/responsible adults
- Lack of employed role models
- Individuals focused on day-to-day survival unlikely to make education a top priority
- Unwillingness or inability to take personal responsibility (e.g., in housing: use of illegal subleases and presence of unaccounted-for tenants)
- Lack of pride in surroundings
- High level of mobility leading to instability in family, education
- Inability to set and work toward goals
- Entitlement mentality promoted by welfare dependency
- Victim mentality promoted by discrimination and dependency

*Describing the problems of the inner city as a result of abstract 'racism' is not helpful  
because fighting 'racism' seems a futile exercise.*

– a community circle participant

**B. Potential solutions**

*We decided early on that the issues of housing, education and jobs were not mutually exclusive, and that if we had to do anything, we had to do all of them . . . One of the things we said is that if the economic bottom line drives the process, then a rising economic tide should diminish segregation. But does it?*

– a community circle participant

The potential solutions that appear here should be regarded as a valuable first cut. As the Community Circles Collaborative proceeds with its second round of discussions, new efforts will be made to help them develop meaningful and effective responses to those issues.

It is also important to remember that many potential solutions are implicit in the issue statements. For example, to address the issue described as “biases in business lending that shortchange women- and minority-owned businesses,” a potential solution might be to work to eliminate those biases, or to find other ways to make more investment capital available to women and minorities.

Again, as was the case with the issues, every attempt has been made to capture the essence of what emerged from the discussants, while also combining and clarifying ideas where appropriate.

*When something isn't working, try something new.*

– a community circle participant

### **1. Employment and opportunity**

Suggestions for increasing employment and economic opportunity generally addressed broad topical categories, such as entrepreneurship and child care.

- Adopt the OxFam approach that sets up micro-loan and revolving credit programs (“money circles”) among groups of inner-city residents. This will help to foster entrepreneurship.
- Increase funding for women- and minority-owned businesses.
- Require basic benefits with all full-time jobs.
- Offer incentives to lenders to make business and home loans to low-income persons.
- Recruit corporations as community partners that can help to provide transportation to job sites, child care, and job offers to center-city residents.
- Improve the transit system by expanding reverse-commute options and using a wider variety of vehicle and service types (e.g., company vans, vanpools, dial-a-ride systems, bus-service rerouting).
- Expand the funding for and availability of adequate child care.

*We found ourselves going back and forth. First, someone would say, well, it's an economic solution we need here, or it's an economic cause of this problem. And then right away someone else would counter with, it's lack of community, it's 'heart' things. What we eventually came up with is that we have to have solutions that are addressed to both sides of the problem, because one or the other isn't going to do it.*

– a community circle participant

### **2. Societal relations and resources**

Suggestions related to social relations focused on communities of faith and sources of information:

- Partner churches to offer and encourage multi-cultural experiences for their congregations.
- Provide anti-racism training and materials for media staff members.
- Work more through communities of faith and rely more on faith-based programs, which are [often] more successful than comparable secular programs.

Keep public libraries open for longer hours, especially evenings and weekends.

*Congregations need to move 'outside the congregational walls.'*

– a community circle participant

### 3. *Housing and neighborhoods*

The most logical breakdown of potential solutions in this category is between housing and neighborhoods.

#### **Housing:**

Mix small apartment buildings with other housing types in new developments.

Allow mixed-use zoning that permits people to live, for example, above stores.

Increase the flexibility of various codes to assist large families, for example by allowing three persons in each bedroom.

Increase the number of duplexes and triplexes with resident owners.

Fund experiments in shared living.

Expand the supply of transitional housing.

Experiment with ways to reduce the profit motive vis-a-vis construction and rehabilitation of affordable housing.

Reinstitute some kind of fair-share housing requirement regionwide.

Put teeth in the Livable Communities Act and the Community Reinvestment Act.

Provide better and more consistent code enforcement.

Increase resources to make landlords accountable for repairs and treatment of tenants.

Offer more widespread down-payment assistance to persons of limited means.

Couple household support programs with housing choice and subsidy.

Test “money circles” as a source of funding for home improvements and other family/household needs.

Experiment with payment-assistance programs, similar to existing utility-assistance programs (e.g., voluntary payments by utility customers to help those in need).

#### **Neighborhoods:**

Pair seniors and young parents so they can get to know one another and exchange services, for example swapping occasional child care for lawn mowing

Expand and support Neighborhood Watch programs.

Improve emergency support systems, as well as awareness of and access to them.

*People like to be with people like themselves.*

– a community circle participant

### 4. *Education*

Ideas for improving public education ran the gamut from those promoting general improvement for all students, regardless of race or socioeconomic status, to those specifically targeting at-risk youngsters from a wide variety of backgrounds. These suggestions fell into several groupings: curriculum and teaching, student support, school choice, recognition of diversity and community relations.

*If we go back to neighborhood schools, poverty areas must have the best, strongest teachers.*

– a community circle participant

**Curriculum and teaching improvements:**

- Teach all students life skills, such as money management, parenting, how to look for a job and how to select appropriate housing.
- Eliminate state curriculum standards except for testing.
- Require academic tests at the elementary, middle-junior high and senior high school levels.
- Rate schools on academic achievement.
- Develop different learning tracks, including at least one that provides a good education to those who will not go to [an academic]college.
- Expand work-study opportunities that do not allow teen-agers to work in fast-food places – for example, home construction/rehabilitation.
- Encourage/recruit corporate sponsorships and internships. Involve businesses in helping students better visualize careers and career paths and learn the skills they will need.
- Educate students for civic participation.
- Require community-service hours, even before high school.
- Equalize school-district spending per child.
- Lengthen both the school day and the school year.

*It is time to leave the premise that everyone is qualified to attend college. It is very important for our country to have mechanics, plumbers, carpenters and others who perform such useful tasks. Dignity is in all work and unfortunately that has been lost.*

– a community circle participant

**Student support:**

- Move away from a “fix the kid” approach to a “fix the system” approach.
- Enhance programs that prevent drop-outs.
- Offer more tutoring.
- Expand mentoring programs.
- Expand after-school activities, especially in the fine and performing arts and other non-athletic program areas.
- Get truants off the streets and into a community center, workplace or community-service setting.
- Require uniforms (although not necessarily “traditional” ones).
- Provide better and more plentiful counseling that is more holistic and incorporates help with chemical abuse.
- Sponsor “burning issues” clubs, lunches or other time to help youngsters deal with issues at home.

*Kids are afraid to go to school because of racism, they're afraid because of sexism, homophobia . . . When they're there, the children are so worried about, am I going to get to my next class, am I going to get home, am I going to get beat up on the way home, am I going to have my lunch money for lunch – that learning is secondary.*

– a community circle participant

**School choice:**

Allow children to go to any [public] school they want.  
Support community schools – “stop busing madness.”  
“Bus for programs, not for numbers.”

*Teachers in the public school system are very unprepared for kids of color.  
Training needs to address not only multiculturalism but it needs to address some of  
the factors of poverty and how they impact on kids. They need to look at learning styles.  
They need to look at how they as teachers can facilitate involvement by parents  
and community members.*

– a community circle participant

**Diversity:**

Fund learning opportunities that bring together or pair students from divergent backgrounds.  
Use instruction and programs focused on the environment and ecology to bring together all  
groups in the community in a common concern and in common enterprise.  
Train teachers in cultural competency.  
Imbue the curriculum with diversity, rather than making diversity a “special event” or giving it  
superficial treatment.  
Offer scholarships to students of color who agree to come back and teach for a minimum period  
of time.

**Community relations:**

Experiment with “peer parent” and buddy programs that help newcomers feel less isolated and  
become more involved in their children’s schools.  
Strengthen the non-educational/pre-school support system that helps to relieve problems in the  
schools, which consists of programs like Head Start, parenting education, mentoring, quality  
child care and non-school recreation.  
Incorporate community facilities, such as community centers, social service centers and health-  
care facilities, within or adjacent to schools to give everyone a “stake” in the success of  
those schools.

*I remember when there were three black teachers in the Minneapolis public schools.  
And yet there were students of color that were going through that school system,  
combating racism as individuals, and going on to become successful participants in society.  
We can blame a lot of things on racism, but let’s not fall into the trap of using that  
as an excuse for a lack of achievement.*

– a community circle participant

## IV. Preparing for the Future

*I think a lot of white people believe, but sometimes don't feel that we can say it, that racism is probably a relatively minor cause of the relatively poor performance of minority kids . . . . It would be incredibly naive to discount the impact of racism on minority kids in our schools, but it seems to me far more significant causes are the breakdown of the African-American family and the lack of role models for young kids. And the sports culture I think is even more important than racism, the idolization of athletes, and the belief that African-American boys in the Minneapolis public schools have – something like 85 percent feel they can have careers in professional sports . . . . But we don't ever talk about any of those other issues.*

– a community circle participant

An important and meaningful dialogue has begun, all across the Twin Cities, and people of good will from all backgrounds are thinking about economic and racial disparities with great intensity.

The community circles generated a profile of many of the important issues. The Community Circle Reports (Section III of this report) contain a wealth of information, insights and ideas that can be used to propel further exploration of the role of race, changing economics and spatial segregation of housing and education throughout the region. They also developed a long and varied list of action ideas.

The community circle process also proved its value through the responses of most participants, who viewed it as a valuable experience they would like to continue or repeat.

There were, however, some weaknesses in the first round of community circles, including a lower level of action outcomes than in similar programs in other communities. This section of the report provides some analysis of the program and recommendations for the second round of community circles.

### **Recommendation #1: Strengthen the action component**

As is evident in Section III of this report, community circle participants talked a great deal about action. They developed long lists of action ideas, in the areas of employment and opportunity, societal relations and resources, housing and neighborhoods, and education. Unfortunately, it appears that few of those participants went on to try to implement any of the action ideas. It is also unclear whether the views of participants had any effect on public policy decisions. This runs counter to what could be expected based on the results of study circle programs in other communities.

#### **A. Improve the final session of the guide**

The final session of the *Choices for Community* guide, which was used in all the community circles, led participants through a process of listing the areas of tension or conflict and the areas of agreement that they had come to in their discussions. The volunteer recorder in each group was then asked to summarize these thoughts on a record that was submitted to the Community Circle Collaborative.

In study circle guides produced by the Study Circles Resource Center, the final session includes a range of action ideas, divided into categories according to what individuals can do, what small groups can do, what institutions can do, and what communities as a whole can do. Those action lists reflect a range of

political viewpoints and are meant simply to assist the study circle in its brainstorming about what action ideas fit best in their community.

The final session of the revised *Choices for Community* guide should include such a list, as well as discussion questions that help participants prioritize those ideas and think about what roles they can play on the neighborhood, community, and regional level.

## **B. Improve the recording process**

Good records from each community circle can be a valuable asset for structuring an action forum, preparing a report that condenses the deliberations, and giving policy input to public officials.

The records submitted from the community circles varied widely in their length, focus, and level of detail. A certain amount of unevenness is to be expected, but more consistency and uniformity would have been extremely helpful. The new *Choices for Community* guide should include simple forms built into each session, giving each recorder specific guidance in how they report the findings of the group.

For the next round, the facilitators should be asked to lead their groups through a summarizing process at the end of each session. This brings the wisdom of the whole group to bear in the recording process, and ensures that the records capture the ideas of the group and the spirit of collaboration.

## **C. Hold a true action forum**

In May 1997, a forum was held for the participants in the first round of community circles. Due to scheduling constraints, that forum occurred before all of the groups had finished their four sessions of deliberation. More importantly, the forum was not structured as an action forum; rather, it was intended to create a large-group deliberation on segregation issues. While some attendees learned a great deal at the forum, it did not prove to be a springboard for action efforts.

A true action forum should be held at the conclusion of the second round of community circles. The Study Circles Resource Center suggests:

“The action forum at the end of each round of study circles is your most important opportunity to galvanize problem solving efforts. At the kickoff, announce the date of the action forum. Invite the study circle participants, coalition members, area organizations working on the issue, and other community members. Use the study circle records to identify themes which emerged from the groups. At the action forum, give people the opportunity to sign up for task forces on those themes. For example, the task forces for a program on race might focus on themes such as improving police-community relations, reducing bias crime, and dealing with race relations among young people. Ask people with some professional expertise in each topic to join that task force. If you are writing a report based on the study circle records, the action forum is an excellent time to release it.

After the action forum, it is critical for program organizers to stay in touch with the task forces. Help them get off the ground by identifying convenors and setting meeting dates. To keep task force efforts in the public eye, create a newsletter which reports on their progress, and encourage newspapers and television stations to cover their work. Provide ways for newcomers to join task forces as the program moves along. The study circle program in Lima, Ohio, went even further, winning a grant from the Ohio Bureau of Justice Services to fund a Violence Prevention Center. The Center was designed to provide staff time to support the eleven task forces which arose from the study circle program. Finally, it is important to celebrate the task force achievements and build on them. One way to do this is through

periodic large-group meetings.”

– excerpted from *Focus on Study Circles*, Winter 1998

#### **D. Include more policymakers in the study circles**

The experience of other communities has shown that a study circle program has its greatest effect on policymaking if public officials themselves are among the participants in the groups. In that way, their authority and expertise is brought into the process, but public officials are treated like fellow human beings rather than experts who have the potential to solve problems by themselves. Their wisdom is included in the mix, but they are not put on the spot. Rather than being treated as the distant recipients of formalized public input, they are treated as powerful collaborators in addressing common problems. Public officials have the chance to hear the concerns of real citizens and realize that citizens are capable of addressing complex issues.

#### **Recommendation #2: Create circles which include both city-dwellers and suburbanites**

One of the most innovative aspects of the Community Circle Collaborative program is its focus on regional issues. Segregation in housing and education is an issue with a regional scope, requiring deliberation and action by people in multiple communities. However, the majority of the community circles were limited to people who lived or worked in a particular area. This made it much more difficult for suburbanites to understand the concerns of city-dwellers, and vice versa.

During the second round, institutions could be paired so that each study circle included people from more than one community. For example, a church in Minneapolis with 10 people signed up to participate could be paired with a suburban Kiwanis Club bringing 10 people. The institutions could meet at either site (or an alternate site), and split their pool of 20 people into two community circles.

Another strategy which could be used along with or instead of the pairing approach would be to locate all the community circles at “sectional” sites. The Twin Cities region could be divided into sections like the spokes of a wheel, with each section including some urban areas as well as second- and third-ring suburbs. All the participants for that section could meet at a large facility with many rooms, such as a school, college campus, library, or community center. On the first evening, participants could be assigned to diverse community circles on the spot. Since multiple circles would be meeting on the same evening in the same building, participants could be brought together for a brief reporting session (20 minutes) at the end of each session. This strategy was used successfully in a study circle program in Oklahoma, where it also ensured greater media coverage since reporters could attend the reporting sessions and get a quick snapshot of the deliberations.

Community circles with a mix of urbanites and suburbanites would probably make the experience more unique, illuminating, and exciting for participants. In addition, action groups or task forces which emerged from the action forum or the community circles themselves would be more likely to combine city-dwellers and suburbanites. That kind of cooperation, in itself, would make a statement to the rest of the region.

#### **Recommendation #3: Improving racial, ethnic, and gender diversity**

##### **A. Race and ethnicity**

The full group of participants (350+) was fairly representative of the Twin Cities community as a whole in terms of race/ethnicity. However, individual groups did not reflect this diversity. As a result, some participants perceived that the process was not representative. A number of comments were made regarding how “the right people aren’t here.”

The suggestions contained in Recommendation #2, above, would help address this problem. However, the Community Circles Collaborative might also expand further, recruiting organizations representing constituencies which weren’t adequately represented in the first round. These could include service clubs and congregations that are known to appeal to members of particular groups. Pairing congregations and other sponsoring organizations to promote racial and ethnic intermingling would be a good measure, even if the urban-suburban strategy mentioned above is not utilized. A third approach would involve deliberately assigning volunteers of one ethnicity to join a discussion group dominated by another. Because it is safe to presume that the vast majority of participants are persons of good will and intent, finding volunteers willing to cross barriers should not be difficult.

## **B. Gender**

The group of participants as a whole was not well-balanced by gender. Men made up only about one-fourth of the participants. The all-female memberships of a couple of study circles even remarked on the absence of male counterparts and asked what could be done to “get the men here.”

Although gender imbalance is not uncommon for a volunteer group of this type, gender imbalance needs to be addressed in the next round of circles. One possible approach would be to specifically invite participation by male-dominated clubs or the men’s groups from various faith communities.

### **Recommendation #4: Give more training and support to facilitators**

The reports from the circles, and the surveys completed by the facilitators themselves, suggest that the quality of facilitation was uneven. This is one of the potential pitfalls of using volunteers, but it need not be a fatal one.

EHEP could turn to professional facilitators to conduct the next round of meetings, but this is not necessary nor even particularly wise. What is needed is better training and support for volunteer facilitators. For example, at least one facilitator complained that the group he or she led frequently strayed from the topic – without any apparent understanding that it is the job of the facilitator to keep the group focused and moving, so it can produce the results it wants within the allotted time.

The facilitator training process and packet reflect this failure to teach the basics. Training emphasized the content of the sessions and cultural considerations – both critical topics, to be sure, but not to the exclusion of learning how to lead a productive meeting, keep the group focused, mediate conflict, and handle difficult people (“difficult” here referring to any number of problems, including glibness, silence, stonewalling, attempts to dominate, etc.).

*Getting people involved in addressing public issues is not a “nice” thing. . . .  
What you want people to say is not that it is a nice thing to do  
but that it’s an absolutely necessary thing to do.*

*– Martha McCoy, Study Circles Resource Center*

Given that some of the facilitators are relatively inexperienced, using co-facilitators might be invaluable. Experienced facilitators could be paired with facilitators who are new to the process. Pairing facilitators of different ethnicities (or a young person and an adult) would also make a statement to the participants about the inclusivity of the project.

Having a monitor present to step in and redirect the group's energy might also be helpful. A monitor can keep an eye on several groups at a time and keep tabs on the clock as well. The monitor's presence allows each facilitator to engage fully in the group's discussion and ensure that both substance and direction remain relevant. Moreover, should any facilitator encounter difficulty with a particular group – belligerence, refusal to focus, etc. – someone else is present to mediate and help the group get moving in positive ways again. The presence of a monitor can aid neophyte and experienced facilitators alike.

In CCC's case, the difficulties in using monitors are logistical: If each group is meeting at its own place and time, it is simply infeasible for a single monitor to be present. Neither would this be an efficient use of anyone's time. Moreover, the number of monitors available will necessarily be limited by the need for each one to be highly experienced in facilitation and/or team leadership. These difficulties could be overcome through a different approach to scheduling discussions.

#### **Recommendation #5: Schedule all meeting times in advance**

Ironically, it is possible that individual groups were given *too much* latitude in scheduling their own meetings – which means that each person's dentist appointment, TV viewing habits, softball league, family demands, vacation and other prior commitments interfered with circle meetings. Multiply this effect by ten or fifteen circle members, and it becomes clear why scheduling was a problem.

Rather than leaving the scheduling decision wide open, it may be more effective to set up group meeting times in advance. For example, meetings in each round of discussions could be slated to take place at one of four or five predetermined times at one of four or five predetermined locations. Discussants would be asked to select one of those times and places to participate, either for the entire series or on a meeting-by-meeting basis. Advance sign-ups would probably be necessary in order to make sure that all time slots have enough participants; otherwise, intended participants would have to be notified of a change in plans.

Although this approach might entail some additional work on the part of the organizers, it might also eliminate some work by eliminating confusion about who is meeting where, and when. Moreover, sponsoring organizations would remain heavily involved in coordinating meetings and keeping track of participants.

Adopting an approach similar to this one could produce several benefits:

- It would impose some discipline on the groups and indicate that the study circles are not a social event that takes place only when everyone is free, but a formalized process with demands of its own.
- It would allow coordinators to balance the sizes of the circles, eliminating problems caused by poor attendance in some groups while others overflow.
- It would allow individuals who might miss one set time to “make up” a session at a different time, thus facilitating participation in the entire series of discussions.
- It would allow individuals to sample different locations, if desired, thus exposing them to a much wider range of viewpoints and ideas.
- It would enable the circle coordinators at any given location to balance racial and gender

representation more effectively, either by pairing sponsoring organizations or by randomly assigning incoming individuals to different discussion groups.

- It would allow for the efficient use of monitors in support of facilitators.
- It would put everyone on essentially the same timetable, with a clear beginning and a clear end.

One potential drawback to this approach is that some groups would lose the continuity and, hence, the familiarity that foster trust and openness. However, the process itself can help to encourage such openness. Moreover, most discussion groups will probably remain essentially intact throughout the entire series due to individual choices.

## **VI. Appendices**

- A. Background on EHEP, CCC
- B. Findings of facilitator questionnaire
- C. List of sponsors and participants

[Dick, anything I should add here from SCRC?]

## **The Choices for Community Project** ***A Report on the First Round of Community Circles***

“We need to develop a regional civics that is not about governmental entities. It’s about citizens, community groups, businesses, and government agencies coming together to act in the common interest of the region.”

– William Barnes, coauthor of *The U.S. Common Market*

### **I. Executive Summary: Principal Findings and Directions for the Future**

A great experiment in democracy is underway in Minneapolis/St. Paul. Since December 1996, over 350 residents of the Twin Cities metropolitan area have been involved in the Choices for Community program, the first effort of its kind to bring citizens of an entire *region* together to deliberate on difficult regional issues. The program is being organized by the Community Circle Collaborative, a cross-sector coalition of over 30 Twin Cities organizations.

In their Community Circles – small, participatory, democratic discussions – citizens addressed issues surrounding educational and residential segregation. Participants shared their hopes, concerns, and recommendations at a Community Forum held in May 1997.

This fall, another round of Community Circles will begin. The program’s organizers and sponsoring organizations are determined to bring many more people into these vital discussions. Based on findings from the first round, the program will also facilitate more opportunities for participants to join in implementing the solutions they develop. With the foundation laid in the first year, the second will become a greater springboard for action at the neighborhood and community levels.

## II. Background: The Community Circle Collaborative

*"It couldn't happen here." Not in Minneapolis-St. Paul, the political home of Hubert Humphrey: Minnesota, America's sane heartland. . . . The Twin Cities was immune to urban decline, inner-suburban decay, urban sprawl – and the polarization that has devastated and divided older, larger regions. After all, we were not Chicago, Detroit, or Milwaukee. We were reform minded, and our philanthropic and governmental centers were coordinated and responsive. Then the 1980s hit, marking our Twin Cities with identical patterns of regional polarization. . . . If it could happen here, no American region is immune. Once polarization occurs, the concentration of poverty, disinvestment, middle-class flight, and urban sprawl grow more and more severe.*

*-- Myron Orfield, Metropolitcs (1997: 1, emphasis added)*

State Legislator Myron Orfield was one of the first citizens in the region to realize that Twin Cities communities were becoming increasingly polarized along the lines of race and class. Changes in regional school districts pointed to serious issues of equity in both housing access and public education.

It is within this context that the Community Circle Collaborative (CCC) was launched. CCC is a metro-wide dialogue project that engages citizens from all walks of life, 8-12 at a time, in study circles held throughout the metro area. Originally a partnership among EHEP, the Minneapolis Initiative Against Racism (MIAR), the Minnesota Minority Education Partnership (MMEP), and the Minnesota Fair Housing Center, the CCC initiative has expanded into a wide-ranging coalition of community-based organizations, public staff and officials, and individuals working in a variety of fields, including social justice, race relations, housing, education, religion, law and social research.

The Collaborative's members were united by their interest in two central questions:

- What are the impacts of existing patterns of residential, economic and racial segregation on the educational achievement and life opportunities of Twin Cities area children and families?
- What can or should we do, as individuals and as a community, to enhance educational success and housing and economic opportunities for *all* children in the Twin Cities area?

*The diversity in our state is greatest among children . . . . So this is a long curve. We'd better start getting some of the answers right now, because they're going to affect an entire generation.*

*– Vivian Jenkins Nelsen, INTER-RACE*

### A. What is a Community Circle?

The Community Circle process is one way help a community achieve new levels of citizenship and civic action. Large-scale Choices for Community programs – often referred to as study circle programs – have been used all over the country to generate reasoned dialogue, decisive policy input, and grass-roots problem-solving.

The impacts of these programs range from new friendships, to neighborhood projects, to city-wide action plans, to new legislation. An evaluation of a study circle program in Greater Cleveland showed basic changes in attitude as a result of the study circles. Study circle participants in Lima, Ohio have done everything from building new playgrounds to changing the makeup of a regional development board. A

state-wide study circle program in Oklahoma helped the state legislature enact sweeping changes in the criminal system.

Community circles, or study circles, are democratic, highly participatory discussion groups which meet several times to address a critical public issue. The discussions are facilitated, and they follow a framework laid out in a discussion guide specific to that issue. The participants talk about how the issue affects them, then consider some of the larger questions surrounding the issue, and, finally, discuss how they might take action on the issue. Successful organizers have been able to mobilize large numbers of citizens – a “community-wide” program in a medium-sized city can involve roughly 1,000 people in 75-100 circles.

While community-wide study circle programs have taken place in many cities and towns, and state-wide study circle programs have taken place in Maine and Oklahoma, the Twin Cities Community Circles project is the first attempt at a region-wide program. With the ascendance of regional issues such as segregation, urban sprawl, and transportation to the forefront of policy debates across the nation, a region-wide model is a much-needed innovation.

*We face our greatest challenges at the neighborhood, regional, and global levels. Our governments are structured to address challenges at the local, state, and national levels.*  
– William Dodge, *Regional Excellence*

Why are these public conversations so unusual? In part, it's because most of what we see today in the media and in public meetings is “positioning” or “posturing.” The purpose of this style is to advocate one point of view or another, at the expense of dialogue and, often, of decorum. Although widely accepted in the media, this type of communication ultimately leads to public cynicism and withdrawal from the political process. Not many people want to compete in such a contrived forum. Community circles offer a refreshing change from the narrow and often restrictive discussions of the past and the competitive debates encouraged by the political process.

*People acting as citizens create new ways of working together and new ways of taking responsibility for what is publicly all of ours.*  
– Dick Little, Education and Housing Equity Project

The community circles process recognizes that agreement is not necessary in order for a conversation to be successful. It is necessary for participants to listen, reflect, and speak from both the head and the heart. Mutual respect and a belief in the enlightening and healing nature of sharing ideas – across boundaries of ethnicity, geography, age, gender, socioeconomic status and even language – can go a long way toward making a conversation rewarding for the community as well as the individuals involved.

In many cultures, circles are symbols of equality, fairness and completeness. The underlying premise of the Community Circles Collaborative process is that solutions to serious and often divisive issues can be found if we put aside our fears and prejudices and work together.

## **B. The Need: Residential and Educational Segregation in the Twin Cities**

The Education and Housing Equity Project (EHEP), the [lead?] partner in the Community Circle Collaborative, was created in early 1995 by a group of education and housing advocates who shared a belief in the pressing need to link the issue of school desegregation with the broader issue of housing and neighborhood segregation. EHEP's mission is to act as a catalyst to build broad-based coalitions and

engage the community in public conversations about and advocacy for promotion of racially and economically inclusive communities that give families of all incomes, races and ethnic backgrounds access to schools and housing throughout the metropolitan area.

*The reason it's critical that we talk is because words have different meanings to different people, and we have different levels of interpretation and reflection from our own experience, our history, our expectations, our own knowledge of where we can go.*

– Dr. Josie Johnson

A few alarming facts highlight the nature and depth of the concerns they wished to address:

- The proportion of people of color who live in poverty is higher in Minneapolis/St. Paul than in any other central city in the nation: 37 percent of African-Americans, 40 percent of Native Americans, 32 percent of Latinos.
- Concentrations of poverty and income disparities between the region's central cities and its suburbs are also among the highest in the nation. The poverty rate in Minneapolis is 18.5 percent, in St. Paul 16.7 percent, but in the suburbs it is only 4.5 percent.
- The central cities are home to only 22 percent of the children enrolled in regional schools, but to 55 percent of the region's impoverished elementary school children.
- Between 1970 and 1984, the population of the metro area increased by 9.7 percent but the land it occupied increased by 25.1 percent.

The organizations which have joined the Community Circle Collaborative may have widely-diverging views about how to solve these problems. However, all of the partners share a common concern about the issue of segregation, and a commitment that residents of the Twin Cities region must be actively engaged in addressing it.

*We know that poverty isn't going anywhere, and racism isn't dead.*

– Vivian Jenkins Nelsen, INTER-RACE

### **C. Chronology of CCC Events**

The Community Circle Collaborative is now more than a year old. A brief chronology of its activities and related events appears below.

**December 1996:** The "Beyond Busing" Kick-Off Forum was held for project sponsors. This event was attended by more than 100 people representing a wide variety of organizations: churches, advocacy groups, academia, public agencies and foundations. Significantly, the event took place in the suburbs (in the St. Louis Park City Council chambers), making it clear from the beginning that this was not a central-city effort but a metro-wide effort. The first two speakers, former St. Paul Mayor George Latimer and education expert Josie Johnson, Ph.D., helped to set the context of the project and to encourage and motivate participants. The two speakers who followed them, Curt Johnson, chair of the Metropolitan Council; and Yusef Mgeni, President of the Urban Coalition, provided information and insights regarding the breadth and depth of segregation problems and costs in the metropolitan area. Following the speakers, individuals representing the state legislature, an outer-ring suburban church, an inner-ring suburban school, a nonprofit housing developer, the media and the Minneapolis Mayor's Office all

described why they planned to participate in the project and urged others to join them. As the event concluded, many new sponsors submitted their pledges to participate by organizing study circles.

**February 1997:** Training for study-circle facilitators was held, and the first Discussion Guide for participants was issued.

**March-June 1997:** Study circle discussion groups met 3-5 times each to discuss the two questions given above. Each group produced a brief report summarizing its discussion and findings. Nearly 350 people participated in these discussions.

**May 1997:** CCC held a Community Forum at Macalester College in St. Paul. This forum was attended by many of the individuals who had participated in study circles and gave them a chance not only to share the results of their deliberations and but also to explore the extent of commonalities among the different groups. The Forum featured Martha McCoy, the Executive Director of the (national) Study Circles Resource Center, whose presentation was followed by two "conversations." The first, moderated by Vivian Jenkins Nelsen, President and CEO of INTER-RACE, focused on the first study-circle question (regarding impacts); the second, moderated by George Latimer, addressed the second question, which focuses on potential solutions. (Section III of this report summarizes the findings of all the study circles.)

**June 1997:** The Institute on Race and Poverty delivers to the McKnight Foundation a report entitled "Examining the Relationship Between Housing, Education, and Persistent Segregation." This report identifies the Twin Cities region as one of the ten most segregated metropolitan regions in the United States.

*The Twin Cities have reached an important time to consider which path it will follow. This community has already begun to creep down the path so familiar to many large urban areas. If the Twin Cities community is to reverse its course, it must begin now. This community must seriously examine and confront what is happening here, and it must come together for real, proven solutions.*

– The Institute on Race and Poverty, University of Minnesota

**July 1997:** All study circle reports were submitted to EHEP. In addition, facilitators and group organizers completed a questionnaire intended to help the study-circle organizers to learn more about the process – successes as well as difficulties – and to glean suggestions concerning how better to proceed in the next round of discussions.

**July-October 1997:** Individual participants who represented interested groups made presentations to their respective organizations, local communities and constituencies.

**September 1997:** The National Conference on Race Relations and America's Public Education System takes place. One of the discussion sites is the Twin Cities. Among the practical issues identified are housing segregation, economic inequity, and the need for long-term solutions rather than quick fixes.

**April 1998:** The final report of the first round of study circles, "Beyond Busing: The First Metrowide Dialogue on the Challenges of Education and Housing Segregation," is issued.

### III. Study Circle Reports

#### A. Issues

*We are in very deep denial. We believe we aren't like Detroit, but we are;  
it's just happening more slowly here.*  
– a community circle participant

The necessary first step in trying to solve thorny social problems is to ensure that those problems are understood in much the same way by all. Therefore, the Community Circles focused their attention first on identifying the issues.

The problem areas identified by CCC participants fell into four fairly distinct groupings:

- Issues related to regional growth and equity in terms of investment, employment and social relations;
- Systemic issues related to housing segregation and neighborhood quality;
- Systemic issues related to education; and
- Issues that arise primarily at the level of the individual.

A small degree of liberty has been taken to clarify meaning or to combine similar thoughts expressed in different ways by more than one participant or study circle. Every effort has been made, however, to retain the essence of what appeared in the study circle reports.

Issues shown in italic type were identified by more than one study group.

#### 1. *Issues of regional growth and equity*

When asked to determine how many societies the Twin Cities have become, people responded in two different ways. One group suggested that we have become “three societies: The very rich, working people, and the poor.” Another described it differently: “Two – those who work and those who don’t.” Regardless of how it is said, though, there was a strong recognition among participants that the region has become polarized into distinct, and often mutually distrusting, camps.

The issues that appear in this grouping deal with the broad context of regional equity – and inequity. They cluster around three topics: investment, employment and social relations.

##### **Investment:**

Spatial mismatch between available fiscal and economic resources and high-order fiscal and social needs – for example, northern part of region needs more infrastructure

Biases in business lending that shortchange women- and minority-owned businesses

Need for more entrepreneurship programs, e.g., micro-loans, money circles

*Perceived and real disadvantages of central-city sites, due to crime, presence of pollutants and an unskilled workforce*

*A focus on the short-term and the bottom line, disregarding long-standing evidence that a “rising tide” does not lift all boats*

Shortage of businesses that are committed to being good corporate citizens

Growth containment affects provision and cost of infrastructure

*Suburbanites like to have the benefits of the city but do not like to pay for them.*  
– a community circle participant

**Employment:**

*Spatial mismatch between available jobs and many of the unemployed – e.g., the northern part of the region needs to provide more jobs*  
Biases in job hiring and wage-setting practices  
Shortage of reverse-commute options that can take inner-city workers to suburban jobs  
*Shortage of quality affordable child care, especially at “non-traditional” work times*  
Changing workforce demographics: more persons of color, more seniors, more women supporting households  
Challenge presented by people who are physically or psychologically unable to “work a 9-5 job”  
Under-recognition by business that well-trained employees lead to greater profitability  
*Lack of benefits with many part-time and low-wage jobs*  
Jobs accessible to residents of poor communities often go to outsiders  
Lack of sufficient interest in and support for entrepreneurship in minority and poor communities

**Social relations:**

*Distortions and stereotypes in media reporting*  
*Reporting of crime that is disproportionate to its occurrence*  
Need for true justice that is timely, fair and makes wise use of parole and community-service options  
Polarization reinforced by racial categories on government forms  
General breakdown of family structure and cohesion due to economic demands, lifestyle choices, decline in community support  
Perceived need to keep track of people with criminal records (e.g., community right-to-know regulations for known sex offenders)  
Tendency for people to remain close to their support networks  
*Decline in traditional values, especially a decline in personal integrity and responsibility*  
Lack of courage to make wise but unpopular decisions

*Churches can perpetuate values but are not always good role models.*  
– a community circle participant

**2. Systemic issues related to housing and neighborhoods**

There was a generally high level of consensus on housing and neighborhood issues, which clustered around two topics: housing stock and neighborhood environment. By far the most often-cited issue was that of exclusionary suburban zoning and development practices, which were mentioned specifically by one-fourth of the reporting groups.

*The people who can afford to pay taxes live out in the suburbs, and the inner city has been getting poorer and poorer. It will continue until there is some massive political determination that we're going to make our inner cities the most attractive places to live, or at least as attractive for all kinds of people as the suburbs are.*  
– a community circle participant

**Housing:**

- Lack of investment in poor or declining neighborhoods
- Poor housing stock that repels stable families, discourages investment
- Lead-based paint and other health hazards
- Lack of neighborhood diversity in housing types, which leads to homogeneous populations
- Inflexible central-city zoning and other regulations that prohibit use of many vacant/abandoned buildings as shelter*
- Shortage of affordable housing*
- Punitive rental property taxes
- High cost of land
- Poor enforcement of existing fair housing laws
- Lack of awareness of opportunities and options among low-income households

*In Minneapolis, the government is sponsoring the destruction of affordable housing, through zoning, through licensing, through housing codes. The city has destroyed countless affordable neighborhoods.*

– a community circle participant

**Neighborhood environment:**

- Unequal power in neighborhood/community relations*
- Inadequate resources for general maintenance, including trash pick-up and yardwork
- Lack of resources to facilitate neighborhood involvement
- Transience caused by poor housing stock, low incomes*
- Land-use plans that give highest priority to accommodating cars (e.g., intrusive highway routes)
- Inadequate transit service (frequency, hours, direct routing and choice of destinations)*
- Exclusionary suburban zoning regulations (e.g., minimum lot size and square footage, garage requirements, development fees)*
- Redlining (insurance, lending, cab service, police response)*
- Crime and perceptions of crime*
- Need to improve conditions for those who “remain behind”

*More affluent neighborhoods [have] essentially accepted socioeconomic redlining.*

– a community circle participant

**3. Systemic issues related to education**

Perspectives on the shortcomings of the educational system were quite diverse but fall into two groupings: One focuses on the in-school experience, the other on the interaction between the school and the surrounding community.

**The school as educational institution:**

- Teachers not living in the community
- Few opportunities to experience diversity
- Institutional discrimination: students receiving differential treatment due to race/color, learning ability, economic status, perceived intelligence, and/or athletic ability, which can lead to artificially raised or lowered expectations
- Focus on short-term results when long-term solutions are needed
- Failure to teach the basics
- Lack of adequate [curriculum] structure

Classes that are too big  
Inability to sustain children's enthusiasm for school beyond 3rd or 4th grade  
Too few minority teachers  
Insufficient counselors and inadequate counseling  
Schools being asked to do far more than teach academics  
Lack of effective means of dealing with children from problem situations; at-risk children  
"falling through the cracks"

*Where we do get the minorities to move out into the suburbs, they have the money, they have the wherewithal, but we . . . have a problem in the sensitivity of our teachers and our educational system . . . One of the biggest problems that [minority kids] are finding is that their teachers are prejudiced. So we move out into the suburbs, and what we encounter are teachers who will not be fair with these kids . . . They're also scared of being in school, because they're afraid of being called names, and if there's a fight, they get kicked out. So there's a racial imbalance.*

– a community circle participant

**The school in the community:**

The school system is not user-friendly or parent-friendly  
Transience disrupting children's stability, ability to learn  
School violence (e.g., children carrying weapons)  
Unequal distribution of school resources, both within and between school districts  
Perception that central-city schools are underfunded  
Special challenges presented by schools impacted by concentrated poverty  
Lack of adequate transportation/transit, which results in reduced access to extra-curricular activities and school choice  
The public-school monopoly – lack of competition and choice  
Poor nutrition among school children  
Language barriers among recent immigrants  
Under-educated, over-worked parents who cannot adequately help their children  
[Household] stability affects academic achievement  
Need for transitional housing to support schools

*You can't learn if you are hungry.*

– a community circle participant

**4. Issues related to individuals**

These issues reflect more general concerns about the state of our society as a whole as well as the plight of individuals within it. Some of these issues are pandemic – that is, they plague people in all races, classes and locations; others are more specific to particular circumstances, especially the circumstances of those living in areas of concentrated poverty.

**Society-wide issues:**

*Substance abuse and addiction*  
Breakdown in the institution of marriage  
Lack of recognition for different family types, e.g., extended families  
Lack of self-esteem in children due to inadequate parenting  
*Lack of respect for the rights, beliefs and property of others*

*Lack of respect for teachers and other elders*  
Fear leading to isolation, high levels of stress  
Negative stereotyping  
Racism  
Denial of racism/segregation problem  
Need for more welcoming in the community

*The white teachers don't like us.  
When a white kid does something good, they get praised.  
When we do something good, they say nothing.*  
– a community circle participant

**Issues more common in areas of concentrated poverty:**

Low incomes/joblessness leading to extralegal economic activity  
Poor parental supervision of children and lack of other supportive/responsible adults  
Lack of employed role models  
Individuals focused on day-to-day survival unlikely to make education a top priority  
Unwillingness or inability to take personal responsibility (e.g., in housing: use of illegal subleases and presence of unaccounted-for tenants)  
Lack of pride in surroundings  
High level of mobility leading to instability in family, education  
Inability to set and work toward goals  
Entitlement mentality promoted by welfare dependency  
Victim mentality promoted by discrimination and dependency

*Describing the problems of the inner city as a result of abstract 'racism' is not helpful because fighting 'racism' seems a futile exercise.*  
– a community circle participant

**B. Potential solutions**

*We decided early on that the issues of housing, education and jobs were not mutually exclusive, and that if we had to do anything, we had to do all of them . . . . One of the things we said is that if the economic bottom line drives the process, then a rising economic tide should diminish segregation. But does it?*  
– a community circle participant

The potential solutions that appear here should be regarded as a valuable first cut. As the Community Circles Collaborative proceeds with its second round of discussions, new efforts will be made to help them develop meaningful and effective responses to those issues.

It is also important to remember that many potential solutions are implicit in the issue statements. For example, to address the issue described as “biases in business lending that shortchange women- and minority-owned businesses,” a potential solution might be to work to eliminate those biases, or to find other ways to make more investment capital available to women and minorities.

Again, as was the case with the issues, every attempt has been made to capture the essence of what emerged from the discussants, while also combining and clarifying ideas where appropriate.

*When something isn't working, try something new.*

– a community circle participant

### **1. Employment and opportunity**

Suggestions for increasing employment and economic opportunity generally addressed broad topical categories, such as entrepreneurship and child care.

Adopt the OxFam approach that sets up micro-loan and revolving credit programs (“money circles”) among groups of inner-city residents. This will help to foster entrepreneurship.

Increase funding for women- and minority-owned businesses.

Require basic benefits with all full-time jobs.

Offer incentives to lenders to make business and home loans to low-income persons.

Recruit corporations as community partners that can help to provide transportation to job sites, child care, and job offers to center-city residents.

Improve the transit system by expanding reverse-commute options and using a wider variety of vehicle and service types (e.g., company vans, vanpools, dial-a-ride systems, bus-service rerouting).

Expand the funding for and availability of adequate child care.

*We found ourselves going back and forth. First, someone would say, well, it's an economic solution we need here, or it's an economic cause of this problem.*

*And then right away someone else would counter with, it's lack of community, it's 'heart' things. What we eventually came up with is that we have to have solutions that are addressed to both sides of the problem, because one or the other isn't going to do it.*

– a community circle participant

### **2. Societal relations and resources**

Suggestions related to social relations focused on communities of faith and sources of information:

Partner churches to offer and encourage multi-cultural experiences for their congregations.

Provide anti-racism training and materials for media staff members.

Work more through communities of faith and rely more on faith-based programs, which are [often] more successful than comparable secular programs.

Keep public libraries open for longer hours, especially evenings and weekends.

*Congregations need to move 'outside the congregational walls.'*

– a community circle participant

### **3. Housing and neighborhoods**

The most logical breakdown of potential solutions in this category is between housing and neighborhoods.

#### **Housing:**

Mix small apartment buildings with other housing types in new developments.

Allow mixed-use zoning that permits people to live, for example, above stores.  
 Increase the flexibility of various codes to assist large families, for example by allowing three persons in each bedroom.  
 Increase the number of duplexes and triplexes with resident owners.  
 Fund experiments in shared living.  
 Expand the supply of transitional housing.  
 Experiment with ways to reduce the profit motive vis-a-vis construction and rehabilitation of affordable housing.  
 Reinstigate some kind of fair-share housing requirement regionwide.  
 Put teeth in the Livable Communities Act and the Community Reinvestment Act.  
 Provide better and more consistent code enforcement.  
 Increase resources to make landlords accountable for repairs and treatment of tenants.  
 Offer more widespread down-payment assistance to persons of limited means.  
 Couple household support programs with housing choice and subsidy.  
 Test "money circles" as a source of funding for home improvements and other family/household needs.  
 Experiment with payment-assistance programs, similar to existing utility-assistance programs (e.g., voluntary payments by utility customers to help those in need).

**Neighborhoods:**

Pair seniors and young parents so they can get to know one another and exchange services, for example swapping occasional child care for lawn mowing  
 Expand and support Neighborhood Watch programs.  
 Improve emergency support systems, as well as awareness of and access to them.

*People like to be with people like themselves.*  
 – a community circle participant

**4. Education**

Ideas for improving public education ran the gamut from those promoting general improvement for all students, regardless of race or socioeconomic status, to those specifically targeting at-risk youngsters from a wide variety of backgrounds. These suggestions fell into several groupings: curriculum and teaching, student support, school choice, recognition of diversity and community relations.

*If we go back to neighborhood schools, poverty areas must have the best, strongest teachers.*  
 – a community circle participant

**Curriculum and teaching improvements:**

Teach all students life skills, such as money management, parenting, how to look for a job and how to select appropriate housing.  
 Eliminate state curriculum standards except for testing.  
 Require academic tests at the elementary, middle-junior high and senior high school levels.  
 Rate schools on academic achievement.  
 Develop different learning tracks, including at least one that provides a good education to those who will not go to [an academic]college.  
 Expand work-study opportunities that do not allow teen-agers to work in fast-food places – for

example, home construction/rehabilitation.  
Encourage/recruit corporate sponsorships and internships. Involve businesses in helping students better visualize careers and career paths and learn the skills they will need.  
Educate students for civic participation.  
Require community-service hours, even before high school.  
Equalize school-district spending per child.  
Lengthen both the school day and the school year.

*It is time to leave the premise that everyone is qualified to attend college. It is very important for our country to have mechanics, plumbers, carpenters and others who perform such useful tasks. Dignity is in all work and unfortunately that has been lost.*  
– a community circle participant

**Student support:**

Move away from a “fix the kid” approach to a “fix the system” approach.  
Enhance programs that prevent drop-outs.  
Offer more tutoring.  
Expand mentoring programs.  
Expand after-school activities, especially in the fine and performing arts and other non-athletic program areas.  
Get truants off the streets and into a community center, workplace or community-service setting.  
Require uniforms (although not necessarily “traditional” ones).  
Provide better and more plentiful counseling that is more holistic and incorporates help with chemical abuse.  
Sponsor “burning issues” clubs, lunches or other time to help youngsters deal with issues at home.

*Kids are afraid to go to school because of racism, they're afraid because of sexism, homophobia . . . When they're there, the children are so worried about, am I going to get to my next class, am I going to get home, am I going to get beat up on the way home, am I going to have my lunch money for lunch – that learning is secondary.*  
– a community circle participant

**School choice:**

Allow children to go to any [public] school they want.  
Support community schools – “stop busing madness.”  
“Bus for programs, not for numbers.”

*Teachers in the public school system are very unprepared for kids of color. Training needs to address not only multiculturalism but it needs to address some of the factors of poverty and how they impact on kids. They need to look at learning styles. They need to look at how they as teachers can facilitate involvement by parents and community members.*  
– a community circle participant

**Diversity:**

Fund learning opportunities that bring together or pair students from divergent backgrounds.

Use instruction and programs focused on the environment and ecology to bring together all groups in the community in a common concern and in common enterprise.  
Train teachers in cultural competency.  
Imbue the curriculum with diversity, rather than making diversity a “special event” or giving it superficial treatment.  
Offer scholarships to students of color who agree to come back and teach for a minimum period of time.

**Community relations:**

Experiment with “peer parent” and buddy programs that help newcomers feel less isolated and become more involved in their children’s schools.  
Strengthen the non-educational/pre-school support system that helps to relieve problems in the schools, which consists of programs like Head Start, parenting education, mentoring, quality child care and non-school recreation.  
Incorporate community facilities, such as community centers, social service centers and health-care facilities, within or adjacent to schools to give everyone a “stake” in the success of those schools.

*I remember when there were three black teachers in the Minneapolis public schools. And yet there were students of color that were going through that school system, combating racism as individuals, and going on to become successful participants in society. We can blame a lot of things on racism, but let's not fall into the trap of using that as an excuse for a lack of achievement.*

– a community circle participant

## IV. Preparing for the Future

*I think a lot of white people believe, but sometimes don't feel that we can say it, that racism is probably a relatively minor cause of the relatively poor performance of minority kids . . . . It would be incredibly naive to discount the impact of racism on minority kids in our schools, but it seems to me far more significant causes are the breakdown of the African-American family and the lack of role models for young kids. And the sports culture I think is even more important than racism, the idolization of athletes, and the belief that African-American boys in the Minneapolis public schools have – something like 85 percent feel they can have careers in professional sports . . . . But we don't ever talk about any of those other issues.*

– a community circle participant

An important and meaningful dialogue has begun, all across the Twin Cities, and people of good will from all backgrounds are thinking about economic and racial disparities with great intensity.

The community circles generated a profile of many of the important issues. The Community Circle Reports (Section III of this report) contain a wealth of information, insights and ideas that can be used to propel further exploration of the role of race, changing economics and spatial segregation of housing and education throughout the region. They also developed a long and varied list of action ideas.

The community circle process also proved its value through the responses of most participants, who viewed it as a valuable experience they would like to continue or repeat.

There were, however, some weaknesses in the first round of community circles, including a lower level of action outcomes than in similar programs in other communities. This section of the report provides some analysis of the program and recommendations for the second round of community circles.

### **Recommendation #1: Strengthen the action component**

As is evident in Section III of this report, community circle participants talked a great deal about action. They developed long lists of action ideas, in the areas of employment and opportunity, societal relations and resources, housing and neighborhoods, and education. Unfortunately, it appears that few of those participants went on to try to implement any of the action ideas. It is also unclear whether the views of participants had any effect on public policy decisions. This runs counter to what could be expected based on the results of study circle programs in other communities.

#### **A. Improve the final session of the guide**

The final session of the *Choices for Community* guide, which was used in all the community circles, led participants through a process of listing the areas of tension or conflict and the areas of agreement that they had come to in their discussions. The volunteer recorder in each group was then asked to summarize these thoughts on a record that was submitted to the Community Circle Collaborative.

In study circle guides produced by the Study Circles Resource Center, the final session includes a range of action ideas, divided into categories according to what individuals can do, what small groups can do, what institutions can do, and what communities as a whole can do. Those action lists reflect a range of political viewpoints and are meant simply to assist the study circle in its brainstorming about what action ideas fit best in their community.

The final session of the revised *Choices for Community* guide should include such a list, as well as discussion questions that help participants prioritize those ideas and think about what roles they can play on the neighborhood, community, and regional level.

### **B. Improve the recording process**

Good records from each community circle can be a valuable asset for structuring an action forum, preparing a report that condenses the deliberations, and giving policy input to public officials.

The records submitted from the community circles varied widely in their length, focus, and level of detail. A certain amount of unevenness is to be expected, but more consistency and uniformity would have been extremely helpful. The new *Choices for Community* guide should include simple forms built into each session, giving each recorder specific guidance in how they report the findings of the group.

For the next round, the facilitators should be asked to lead their groups through a summarizing process at the end of each session. This brings the wisdom of the whole group to bear in the recording process, and ensures that the records capture the ideas of the group and the spirit of collaboration.

### **C. Hold a true action forum**

In May 1997, a forum was held for the participants in the first round of community circles. Due to scheduling constraints, that forum occurred before all of the groups had finished their four sessions of deliberation. More importantly, the forum was not structured as an action forum; rather, it was intended to create a large-group deliberation on segregation issues. While some attendees learned a great deal at the forum, it did not prove to be a springboard for action efforts.

A true action forum should be held at the conclusion of the second round of community circles. The Study Circles Resource Center suggests:

“The action forum at the end of each round of study circles is your most important opportunity to galvanize problem solving efforts. At the kickoff, announce the date of the action forum. Invite the study circle participants, coalition members, area organizations working on the issue, and other community members. Use the study circle records to identify themes which emerged from the groups. At the action forum, give people the opportunity to sign up for task forces on those themes. For example, the task forces for a program on race might focus on themes such as improving police-community relations, reducing bias crime, and dealing with race relations among young people. Ask people with some professional expertise in each topic to join that task force. If you are writing a report based on the study circle records, the action forum is an excellent time to release it.

After the action forum, it is critical for program organizers to stay in touch with the task forces. Help them get off the ground by identifying convenors and setting meeting dates. To keep task force efforts in the public eye, create a newsletter which reports on their progress, and encourage newspapers and television stations to cover their work. Provide ways for newcomers to join task forces as the program moves along. The study circle program in Lima, Ohio, went even further, winning a grant from the Ohio Bureau of Justice Services to fund a Violence Prevention Center. The Center was designed to provide staff time to support the eleven task forces which arose from the study circle program. Finally, it is important to celebrate the task force achievements and build on them. One way to do this is through periodic large-group meetings.”

– excerpted from *Focus on Study Circles*, Winter 1998

#### **D. Include more policymakers in the study circles**

The experience of other communities has shown that a study circle program has its greatest effect on policymaking if public officials themselves are among the participants in the groups. In that way, their authority and expertise is brought into the process, but public officials are treated like fellow human beings rather than experts who have the potential to solve problems by themselves. Their wisdom is included in the mix, but they are not put on the spot. Rather than being treated as the distant recipients of formalized public input, they are treated as powerful collaborators in addressing common problems. Public officials have the chance to hear the concerns of real citizens and realize that citizens are capable of addressing complex issues.

#### **Recommendation #2: Create circles which include both city-dwellers and suburbanites**

One of the most innovative aspects of the Community Circle Collaborative program is its focus on regional issues. Segregation in housing and education is an issue with a regional scope, requiring deliberation and action by people in multiple communities. However, the majority of the community circles were limited to people who lived or worked in a particular area. This made it much more difficult for suburbanites to understand the concerns of city-dwellers, and vice versa.

During the second round, institutions could be paired so that each study circle included people from more than one community. For example, a church in Minneapolis with 10 people signed up to participate could be paired with a suburban Kiwanis Club bringing 10 people. The institutions could meet at either site (or an alternate site), and split their pool of 20 people into two community circles.

Another strategy which could be used along with or instead of the pairing approach would be to locate all the community circles at "sectional" sites. The Twin Cities region could be divided into sections like the spokes of a wheel, with each section including some urban areas as well as second- and third-ring suburbs. All the participants for that section could meet at a large facility with many rooms, such as a school, college campus, library, or community center. On the first evening, participants could be assigned to diverse community circles on the spot. Since multiple circles would be meeting on the same evening in the same building, participants could be brought together for a brief reporting session (20 minutes) at the end of each session. This strategy was used successfully in a study circle program in Oklahoma, where it also ensured greater media coverage since reporters could attend the reporting sessions and get a quick snapshot of the deliberations.

Community circles with a mix of urbanites and suburbanites would probably make the experience more unique, illuminating, and exciting for participants. In addition, action groups or task forces which emerged from the action forum or the community circles themselves would be more likely to combine city-dwellers and suburbanites. That kind of cooperation, in itself, would make a statement to the rest of the region.

#### **Recommendation #3: Improving racial, ethnic, and gender diversity**

##### **A. Race and ethnicity**

The full group of participants (350+) was fairly representative of the Twin Cities community as a whole in terms of race/ethnicity. However, individual groups did not reflect this diversity. As a result, some participants perceived that the process was not representative. A number of comments were made regarding how "the right people aren't here."

The suggestions contained in Recommendation #2, above, would help address this problem. However,

the Community Circles Collaborative might also expand further, recruiting organizations representing constituencies which weren't adequately represented in the first round. These could include service clubs and congregations that are known to appeal to members of particular groups. Pairing congregations and other sponsoring organizations to promote racial and ethnic intermingling would be a good measure, even if the urban-suburban strategy mentioned above is not utilized. A third approach would involve deliberately assigning volunteers of one ethnicity to join a discussion group dominated by another. Because it is safe to presume that the vast majority of participants are persons of good will and intent, finding volunteers willing to cross barriers should not be difficult.

## **B. Gender**

The group of participants as a whole was not well-balanced by gender. Men made up only about one-fourth of the participants. The all-female memberships of a couple of study circles even remarked on the absence of male counterparts and asked what could be done to "get the men here."

Although gender imbalance is not uncommon for a volunteer group of this type, gender imbalance needs to be addressed in the next round of circles. One possible approach would be to specifically invite participation by male-dominated clubs or the men's groups from various faith communities.

### **Recommendation #4: Give more training and support to facilitators**

The reports from the circles, and the surveys completed by the facilitators themselves, suggest that the quality of facilitation was uneven. This is one of the potential pitfalls of using volunteers, but it need not be a fatal one.

EHEP could turn to professional facilitators to conduct the next round of meetings, but this is not necessary nor even particularly wise. What is needed is better training and support for volunteer facilitators. For example, at least one facilitator complained that the group he or she led frequently strayed from the topic – without any apparent understanding that it is the job of the facilitator to keep the group focused and moving, so it can produce the results it wants within the allotted time.

The facilitator training process and packet reflect this failure to teach the basics. Training emphasized the content of the sessions and cultural considerations – both critical topics, to be sure, but not to the exclusion of learning how to lead a productive meeting, keep the group focused, mediate conflict, and handle difficult people ("difficult" here referring to any number of problems, including glibness, silence, stonewalling, attempts to dominate, etc.).

*Getting people involved in addressing public issues is not a "nice" thing. . . .*

*What you want people to say is not that it is a nice thing to do  
but that it's an absolutely necessary thing to do.*

*– Martha McCoy, Study Circles Resource Center*

Given that some of the facilitators are relatively inexperienced, using co-facilitators might be invaluable. Experienced facilitators could be paired with facilitators who are new to the process. Pairing facilitators of different ethnicities (or a young person and an adult) would also make a statement to the participants about the inclusivity of the project.

Having a monitor present to step in and redirect the group's energy might also be helpful. A monitor can keep an eye on several groups at a time and keep tabs on the clock as well. The monitor's presence allows each facilitator to engage fully in the group's discussion and ensure that both substance and

direction remain relevant. Moreover, should any facilitator encounter difficulty with a particular group – belligerence, refusal to focus, etc. – someone else is present to mediate and help the group get moving in positive ways again. The presence of a monitor can aid neophyte and experienced facilitators alike.

In CCC's case, the difficulties in using monitors are logistical: If each group is meeting at its own place and time, it is simply infeasible for a single monitor to be present. Neither would this be an efficient use of anyone's time. Moreover, the number of monitors available will necessarily be limited by the need for each one to be highly experienced in facilitation and/or team leadership. These difficulties could be overcome through a different approach to scheduling discussions.

#### **Recommendation #5: Schedule all meeting times in advance**

Ironically, it is possible that individual groups were given *too much* latitude in scheduling their own meetings – which means that each person's dentist appointment, TV viewing habits, softball league, family demands, vacation and other prior commitments interfered with circle meetings. Multiply this effect by ten or fifteen circle members, and it becomes clear why scheduling was a problem.

Rather than leaving the scheduling decision wide open, it may be more effective to set up group meeting times in advance. For example, meetings in each round of discussions could be slated to take place at one of four or five predetermined times at one of four or five predetermined locations. Discussants would be asked to select one of those times and places to participate, either for the entire series or on a meeting-by-meeting basis. Advance sign-ups would probably be necessary in order to make sure that all time slots have enough participants; otherwise, intended participants would have to be notified of a change in plans.

Although this approach might entail some additional work on the part of the organizers, it might also eliminate some work by eliminating confusion about who is meeting where, and when. Moreover, sponsoring organizations would remain heavily involved in coordinating meetings and keeping track of participants.

Adopting an approach similar to this one could produce several benefits:

- It would impose some discipline on the groups and indicate that the study circles are not a social event that takes place only when everyone is free, but a formalized process with demands of its own.
- It would allow coordinators to balance the sizes of the circles, eliminating problems caused by poor attendance in some groups while others overflow.
- It would allow individuals who might miss one set time to "make up" a session at a different time, thus facilitating participation in the entire series of discussions.
- It would allow individuals to sample different locations, if desired, thus exposing them to a much wider range of viewpoints and ideas.
- It would enable the circle coordinators at any given location to balance racial and gender representation more effectively, either by pairing sponsoring organizations or by randomly assigning incoming individuals to different discussion groups.
- It would allow for the efficient use of monitors in support of facilitators.
- It would put everyone on essentially the same timetable, with a clear beginning and a clear end.

One potential drawback to this approach is that some groups would lose the continuity and, hence, the familiarity that foster trust and openness. However, the process itself can help to encourage such openness. Moreover, most discussion groups will probably remain essentially intact throughout the entire series due to individual choices.

## **VI. Appendices**

- A. Background on EHEP, CCC
- B. Findings of facilitator questionnaire
- C. List of sponsors and participants

[Dick, anything I should add here from SCRC?]

# **The Choices for Community Project**

## ***A Report on the First Round of Community Circles***

“We need to develop a regional civics that is not about governmental entities. It’s about citizens, community groups, businesses, and government agencies coming together to act in the common interest of the region.”

– William Barnes, coauthor of *The U.S. Common Market*

### **I. Executive Summary: Principal Findings and Directions for the Future**

A great experiment in democracy is underway in Minneapolis/St. Paul. Since December 1996, over 350 residents of the Twin Cities metropolitan area have been involved in the Choices for Community program, the first effort of its kind to bring citizens of an entire *region* together to deliberate on difficult regional issues. The program is being organized by the Community Circle Collaborative, a cross-sector coalition of over 30 Twin Cities organizations.

In their Community Circles – small, participatory, democratic discussions – citizens addressed issues surrounding educational and residential segregation. Participants shared their hopes, concerns, and recommendations at a Community Forum held in May 1997.

This fall, another round of Community Circles will begin. The program’s organizers and sponsoring organizations are determined to bring many more people into these vital discussions. Based on findings from the first round, the program will also facilitate more opportunities for participants to join in implementing the solutions they develop. With the foundation laid in the first year, the second will become a greater springboard for action at the neighborhood and community levels.

## II. Background: The Community Circle Collaborative

*"It couldn't happen here." Not in Minneapolis-St. Paul, the political home of Hubert Humphrey: Minnesota, America's sane heartland. . . . The Twin Cities was immune to urban decline, inner-suburban decay, urban sprawl – and the polarization that has devastated and divided older, larger regions. After all, we were not Chicago, Detroit, or Milwaukee. We were reform minded, and our philanthropic and governmental centers were coordinated and responsive. Then the 1980s hit, marking our Twin Cities with identical patterns of regional polarization. . . . If it could happen here, no American region is immune. Once polarization occurs, the concentration of poverty, disinvestment, middle-class flight, and urban sprawl grow more and more severe.*

*-- Myron Orfield, Metropolitcs (1997: 1, emphasis added)*

State Legislator Myron Orfield was one of the first citizens in the region to realize that Twin Cities communities were becoming increasingly polarized along the lines of race and class. Changes in regional school districts pointed to serious issues of equity in both housing access and public education.

It is within this context that the Community Circle Collaborative (CCC) was launched. CCC is a metro-wide dialogue project that engages citizens from all walks of life, 8-12 at a time, in study circles held throughout the metro area. Originally a partnership among EHEP, the Minneapolis Initiative Against Racism (MIAR), the Minnesota Minority Education Partnership (MMEP), and the Minnesota Fair Housing Center, the CCC initiative has expanded into a wide-ranging coalition of community-based organizations, public staff and officials, and individuals working in a variety of fields, including social justice, race relations, housing, education, religion, law and social research.

The Collaborative's members were united by their interest in two central questions:

- What are the impacts of existing patterns of residential, economic and racial segregation on the educational achievement and life opportunities of Twin Cities area children and families?
- What can or should we do, as individuals and as a community, to enhance educational success and housing and economic opportunities for *all* children in the Twin Cities area?

*The diversity in our state is greatest among children . . . . So this is a long curve. We'd better start getting some of the answers right now, because they're going to affect an entire generation.*

*-- Vivian Jenkins Nelsen, INTER-RACE*

### A. What is a Community Circle?

The Community Circle process is one way help a community achieve new levels of citizenship and civic action. Large-scale Choices for Community programs – often referred to as study circle programs – have been used all over the country to generate reasoned dialogue, decisive policy input, and grass-roots problem-solving.

The impacts of these programs range from new friendships, to neighborhood projects, to city-wide action plans, to new legislation. An evaluation of a study circle program in Greater Cleveland showed basic changes in attitude as a result of the study circles. Study circle participants in Lima, Ohio have done everything from building new playgrounds to changing the makeup of a regional development board. A

state-wide study circle program in Oklahoma helped the state legislature enact sweeping changes in the criminal system.

Community circles, or study circles, are democratic, highly participatory discussion groups which meet several times to address a critical public issue. The discussions are facilitated, and they follow a framework laid out in a discussion guide specific to that issue. The participants talk about how the issue affects them, then consider some of the larger questions surrounding the issue, and, finally, discuss how they might take action on the issue. Successful organizers have been able to mobilize large numbers of citizens – a “community-wide” program in a medium-sized city can involve roughly 1,000 people in 75-100 circles.

While community-wide study circle programs have taken place in many cities and towns, and state-wide study circle programs have taken place in Maine and Oklahoma, the Twin Cities Community Circles project is the first attempt at a region-wide program. With the ascendance of regional issues such as segregation, urban sprawl, and transportation to the forefront of policy debates across the nation, a region-wide model is a much-needed innovation.

*We face our greatest challenges at the neighborhood, regional, and global levels. Our governments are structured to address challenges at the local, state, and national levels.*  
– William Dodge, *Regional Excellence*

Why are these public conversations so unusual? In part, it's because most of what we see today in the media and in public meetings is “positioning” or “posturing.” The purpose of this style is to advocate one point of view or another, at the expense of dialogue and, often, of decorum. Although widely accepted in the media, this type of communication ultimately leads to public cynicism and withdrawal from the political process. Not many people want to compete in such a contrived forum. Community circles offer a refreshing change from the narrow and often restrictive discussions of the past and the competitive debates encouraged by the political process.

*People acting as citizens create new ways of working together and new ways of taking responsibility for what is publicly all of ours.*  
– Dick Little, Education and Housing Equity Project

The community circles process recognizes that agreement is not necessary in order for a conversation to be successful. It is necessary for participants to listen, reflect, and speak from both the head and the heart. Mutual respect and a belief in the enlightening and healing nature of sharing ideas – across boundaries of ethnicity, geography, age, gender, socioeconomic status and even language – can go a long way toward making a conversation rewarding for the community as well as the individuals involved.

In many cultures, circles are symbols of equality, fairness and completeness. The underlying premise of the Community Circles Collaborative process is that solutions to serious and often divisive issues can be found if we put aside our fears and prejudices and work together.

## **B. The Need: Residential and Educational Segregation in the Twin Cities**

The Education and Housing Equity Project (EHEP), the [lead?] partner in the Community Circle Collaborative, was created in early 1995 by a group of education and housing advocates who shared a belief in the pressing need to link the issue of school desegregation with the broader issue of housing and neighborhood segregation. EHEP's mission is to act as a catalyst to build broad-based coalitions and

engage the community in public conversations about and advocacy for promotion of racially and economically inclusive communities that give families of all incomes, races and ethnic backgrounds access to schools and housing throughout the metropolitan area.

*The reason it's critical that we talk is because words have different meanings to different people, and we have different levels of interpretation and reflection from our own experience, our history, our expectations, our own knowledge of where we can go.*

– Dr. Josie Johnson

A few alarming facts highlight the nature and depth of the concerns they wished to address:

- The proportion of people of color who live in poverty is higher in Minneapolis/St. Paul than in any other central city in the nation: 37 percent of African-Americans, 40 percent of Native Americans, 32 percent of Latinos.
- Concentrations of poverty and income disparities between the region's central cities and its suburbs are also among the highest in the nation. The poverty rate in Minneapolis is 18.5 percent, in St. Paul 16.7 percent, but in the suburbs it is only 4.5 percent.
- The central cities are home to only 22 percent of the children enrolled in regional schools, but to 55 percent of the region's impoverished elementary school children.
- Between 1970 and 1984, the population of the metro area increased by 9.7 percent but the land it occupied increased by 25.1 percent.

The organizations which have joined the Community Circle Collaborative may have widely-diverging views about how to solve these problems. However, all of the partners share a common concern about the issue of segregation, and a commitment that residents of the Twin Cities region must be actively engaged in addressing it.

*We know that poverty isn't going anywhere, and racism isn't dead.*

– Vivian Jenkins Nelsen, INTER-RACE

### **C. Chronology of CCC Events**

The Community Circle Collaborative is now more than a year old. A brief chronology of its activities and related events appears below.

**December 1996:** The “Beyond Busing” Kick-Off Forum was held for project sponsors. This event was attended by more than 100 people representing a wide variety of organizations: churches, advocacy groups, academia, public agencies and foundations. Significantly, the event took place in the suburbs (in the St. Louis Park City Council chambers), making it clear from the beginning that this was not a central-city effort but a metro-wide effort. The first two speakers, former St. Paul Mayor George Latimer and education expert Josie Johnson, Ph.D., helped to set the context of the project and to encourage and motivate participants. The two speakers who followed them, Curt Johnson, chair of the Metropolitan Council; and Yusef Mgeni, President of the Urban Coalition, provided information and insights regarding the breadth and depth of segregation problems and costs in the metropolitan area. Following the speakers, individuals representing the state legislature, an outer-ring suburban church, an inner-ring suburban school, a nonprofit housing developer, the media and the Minneapolis Mayor's Office all described why

they planned to participate in the project and urged others to join them. As the event concluded, many new sponsors submitted their pledges to participate by organizing study circles.

**February 1997:** Training for study-circle facilitators was held, and the first Discussion Guide for participants was issued.

**March-June 1997:** Study circle discussion groups met 3-5 times each to discuss the two questions given above. Each group produced a brief report summarizing its discussion and findings. Nearly 350 people participated in these discussions.

**May 1997:** CCC held a Community Forum at Macalester College in St. Paul. This forum was attended by many of the individuals who had participated in study circles and gave them a chance not only to share the results of their deliberations and but also to explore the extent of commonalities among the different groups. The Forum featured Martha McCoy, the Executive Director of the (national) Study Circles Resource Center, whose presentation was followed by two "conversations." The first, moderated by Vivian Jenkins Nelsen, President and CEO of INTER-RACE, focused on the first study-circle question (regarding impacts); the second, moderated by George Latimer, addressed the second question, which focuses on potential solutions. (Section III of this report summarizes the findings of all the study circles.)

**June 1997:** The Institute on Race and Poverty delivers to the McKnight Foundation a report entitled "Examining the Relationship Between Housing, Education, and Persistent Segregation." This report identifies the Twin Cities region as one of the ten most segregated metropolitan regions in the United States.

*The Twin Cities have reached an important time to consider which path it will follow. This community has already begun to creep down the path so familiar to many large urban areas. If the Twin Cities community is to reverse its course, it must begin now. This community must seriously examine and confront what is happening here, and it must come together for real, proven solutions.*

– The Institute on Race and Poverty, University of Minnesota

**July 1997:** All study circle reports were submitted to EHEP. In addition, facilitators and group organizers completed a questionnaire intended to help the study-circle organizers to learn more about the process – successes as well as difficulties – and to glean suggestions concerning how better to proceed in the next round of discussions.

**July-October 1997:** Individual participants who represented interested groups made presentations to their respective organizations, local communities and constituencies.

**September 1997:** The National Conference on Race Relations and America's Public Education System takes place. One of the discussion sites is the Twin Cities. Among the practical issues identified are housing segregation, economic inequity, and the need for long-term solutions rather than quick fixes.

**April 1998:** The final report of the first round of study circles, "Beyond Busing: The First Metrowide Dialogue on the Challenges of Education and Housing Segregation," is issued.

### III. Study Circle Reports

#### A. Issues

*We are in very deep denial. We believe we aren't like Detroit, but we are;  
it's just happening more slowly here.*  
– a community circle participant

The necessary first step in trying to solve thorny social problems is to ensure that those problems are understood in much the same way by all. Therefore, the Community Circles focused their attention first on identifying the issues.

The problem areas identified by CCC participants fell into four fairly distinct groupings:

- Issues related to regional growth and equity in terms of investment, employment and social relations;
- Systemic issues related to housing segregation and neighborhood quality;
- Systemic issues related to education; and
- Issues that arise primarily at the level of the individual.

A small degree of liberty has been taken to clarify meaning or to combine similar thoughts expressed in different ways by more than one participant or study circle. Every effort has been made, however, to retain the essence of what appeared in the study circle reports.

Issues shown in italic type were identified by more than one study group.

#### 1. *Issues of regional growth and equity*

When asked to determine how many societies the Twin Cities have become, people responded in two different ways. One group suggested that we have become “three societies: The very rich, working people, and the poor.” Another described it differently: “Two – those who work and those who don't.” Regardless of how it is said, though, there was a strong recognition among participants that the region has become polarized into distinct, and often mutually distrusting, camps.

The issues that appear in this grouping deal with the broad context of regional equity – and inequity. They cluster around three topics: investment, employment and social relations.

##### **Investment:**

Spatial mismatch between available fiscal and economic resources and high-order fiscal and social needs – for example, northern part of region needs more infrastructure

Biases in business lending that shortchange women- and minority-owned businesses

Need for more entrepreneurship programs, e.g., micro-loans, money circles

*Perceived and real disadvantages of central-city sites, due to crime, presence of pollutants and an unskilled workforce*

*A focus on the short-term and the bottom line, disregarding long-standing evidence that a “rising tide” does not lift all boats*

Shortage of businesses that are committed to being good corporate citizens

Growth containment affects provision and cost of infrastructure

*Suburbanites like to have the benefits of the city but do not like to pay for them.*  
– a community circle participant

**Employment:**

*Spatial mismatch between available jobs and many of the unemployed – e.g., the northern part of the region needs to provide more jobs*  
Biases in job hiring and wage-setting practices  
Shortage of reverse-commute options that can take inner-city workers to suburban jobs  
*Shortage of quality affordable child care, especially at “non-traditional” work times*  
Changing workforce demographics: more persons of color, more seniors, more women supporting households  
Challenge presented by people who are physically or psychologically unable to “work a 9-5 job”  
Under-recognition by business that well-trained employees lead to greater profitability  
*Lack of benefits with many part-time and low-wage jobs*  
Jobs accessible to residents of poor communities often go to outsiders  
Lack of sufficient interest in and support for entrepreneurship in minority and poor communities

**Social relations:**

*Distortions and stereotypes in media reporting*  
*Reporting of crime that is disproportionate to its occurrence*  
Need for true justice that is timely, fair and makes wise use of parole and community-service options  
Polarization reinforced by racial categories on government forms  
General breakdown of family structure and cohesion due to economic demands, lifestyle choices, decline in community support  
Perceived need to keep track of people with criminal records (e.g., community right-to-know regulations for known sex offenders)  
Tendency for people to remain close to their support networks  
*Decline in traditional values, especially a decline in personal integrity and responsibility*  
Lack of courage to make wise but unpopular decisions

*Churches can perpetuate values but are not always good role models.*  
– a community circle participant

**2. Systemic issues related to housing and neighborhoods**

There was a generally high level of consensus on housing and neighborhood issues, which clustered around two topics: housing stock and neighborhood environment. By far the most often-cited issue was that of exclusionary suburban zoning and development practices, which were mentioned specifically by one-fourth of the reporting groups.

*The people who can afford to pay taxes live out in the suburbs, and the inner city has been getting poorer and poorer. It will continue until there is some massive political determination that we're going to make our inner cities the most attractive places to live, or at least as attractive for all kinds of people as the suburbs are.*  
– a community circle participant

**Housing:**

Lack of investment in poor or declining neighborhoods  
 Poor housing stock that repels stable families, discourages investment  
 Lead-based paint and other health hazards  
 Lack of neighborhood diversity in housing types, which leads to homogeneous populations  
*Inflexible central-city zoning and other regulations that prohibit use of many vacant/abandoned buildings as shelter*  
*Shortage of affordable housing*  
 Punitive rental property taxes  
 High cost of land  
 Poor enforcement of existing fair housing laws  
 Lack of awareness of opportunities and options among low-income households

*In Minneapolis, the government is sponsoring the destruction of affordable housing, through zoning, through licensing, through housing codes. The city has destroyed countless affordable neighborhoods.*

– a community circle participant

**Neighborhood environment:**

*Unequal power in neighborhood/community relations*  
 Inadequate resources for general maintenance, including trash pick-up and yardwork  
 Lack of resources to facilitate neighborhood involvement  
*Transience caused by poor housing stock, low incomes*  
 Land-use plans that give highest priority to accommodating cars (e.g., intrusive highway routes)  
*Inadequate transit service (frequency, hours, direct routing and choice of destinations)*  
*Exclusionary suburban zoning regulations (e.g., minimum lot size and square footage, garage requirements, development fees)*  
*Redlining (insurance, lending, cab service, police response)*  
*Crime and perceptions of crime*  
 Need to improve conditions for those who “remain behind”

*More affluent neighborhoods [have] essentially accepted socioeconomic redlining.*

– a community circle participant

**3. Systemic issues related to education**

Perspectives on the shortcomings of the educational system were quite diverse but fall into two groupings: One focuses on the in-school experience, the other on the interaction between the school and the surrounding community.

**The school as educational institution:**

Teachers not living in the community  
 Few opportunities to experience diversity  
 Institutional discrimination: students receiving differential treatment due to race/color, learning ability, economic status, perceived intelligence, and/or athletic ability, which can lead to artificially raised or lowered expectations  
 Focus on short-term results when long-term solutions are needed  
 Failure to teach the basics  
 Lack of adequate [curriculum] structure

Classes that are too big  
Inability to sustain children's enthusiasm for school beyond 3rd or 4th grade  
Too few minority teachers  
Insufficient counselors and inadequate counseling  
Schools being asked to do far more than teach academics  
Lack of effective means of dealing with children from problem situations; at-risk children  
"falling through the cracks"

*Where we do get the minorities to move out into the suburbs, they have the money, they have the wherewithal, but we . . . have a problem in the sensitivity of our teachers and our educational system . . . One of the biggest problems that [minority kids] are finding is that their teachers are prejudiced. So we move out into the suburbs, and what we encounter are teachers who will not be fair with these kids . . . They're also scared of being in school, because they're afraid of being called names, and if there's a fight, they get kicked out. So there's a racial imbalance.*  
– a community circle participant

**The school in the community:**

The school system is not user-friendly or parent-friendly  
Transience disrupting children's stability, ability to learn  
School violence (e.g., children carrying weapons)  
Unequal distribution of school resources, both within and between school districts  
Perception that central-city schools are underfunded  
Special challenges presented by schools impacted by concentrated poverty  
Lack of adequate transportation/transit, which results in reduced access to extra-curricular activities and school choice  
The public-school monopoly – lack of competition and choice  
Poor nutrition among school children  
Language barriers among recent immigrants  
Under-educated, over-worked parents who cannot adequately help their children  
[Household] stability affects academic achievement  
Need for transitional housing to support schools

*You can't learn if you are hungry.*  
– a community circle participant

**4. Issues related to individuals**

These issues reflect more general concerns about the state of our society as a whole as well as the plight of individuals within it. Some of these issues are pandemic – that is, they plague people in all races, classes and locations; others are more specific to particular circumstances, especially the circumstances of those living in areas of concentrated poverty.

**Society-wide issues:**

*Substance abuse and addiction*  
Breakdown in the institution of marriage  
Lack of recognition for different family types, e.g., extended families  
Lack of self-esteem in children due to inadequate parenting  
*Lack of respect for the rights, beliefs and property of others*

*Lack of respect for teachers and other elders*  
Fear leading to isolation, high levels of stress  
Negative stereotyping  
Racism  
Denial of racism/segregation problem  
Need for more welcoming in the community

*The white teachers don't like us.  
When a white kid does something good, they get praised.  
When we do something good, they say nothing.*  
– a community circle participant

**Issues more common in areas of concentrated poverty:**

Low incomes/joblessness leading to extralegal economic activity  
Poor parental supervision of children and lack of other supportive/responsible adults  
Lack of employed role models  
Individuals focused on day-to-day survival unlikely to make education a top priority  
Unwillingness or inability to take personal responsibility (e.g., in housing: use of illegal subleases and presence of unaccounted-for tenants)  
Lack of pride in surroundings  
High level of mobility leading to instability in family, education  
Inability to set and work toward goals  
Entitlement mentality promoted by welfare dependency  
Victim mentality promoted by discrimination and dependency

*Describing the problems of the inner city as a result of abstract 'racism' is not helpful  
because fighting 'racism' seems a futile exercise.*  
– a community circle participant

**B. Potential solutions**

*We decided early on that the issues of housing, education and jobs were not mutually exclusive, and that if we had to do anything, we had to do all of them . . . . One of the things we said is that if the economic bottom line drives the process, then a rising economic tide should diminish segregation. But does it?*  
– a community circle participant

The potential solutions that appear here should be regarded as a valuable first cut. As the Community Circles Collaborative proceeds with its second round of discussions, new efforts will be made to help them develop meaningful and effective responses to those issues.

It is also important to remember that many potential solutions are implicit in the issue statements. For example, to address the issue described as “biases in business lending that shortchange women- and minority-owned businesses.” a potential solution might be to work to eliminate those biases, or to find other ways to make more investment capital available to women and minorities.

Again, as was the case with the issues, every attempt has been made to capture the essence of what emerged from the discussants, while also combining and clarifying ideas where appropriate.

*When something isn't working, try something new.*

– a community circle participant

### **1. Employment and opportunity**

Suggestions for increasing employment and economic opportunity generally addressed broad topical categories, such as entrepreneurship and child care.

Adopt the OxFam approach that sets up micro-loan and revolving credit programs (“money circles”) among groups of inner-city residents. This will help to foster entrepreneurship.

Increase funding for women- and minority-owned businesses.

Require basic benefits with all full-time jobs.

Offer incentives to lenders to make business and home loans to low-income persons.

Recruit corporations as community partners that can help to provide transportation to job sites, child care, and job offers to center-city residents.

Improve the transit system by expanding reverse-commute options and using a wider variety of vehicle and service types (e.g., company vans, vanpools, dial-a-ride systems, bus-service rerouting).

Expand the funding for and availability of adequate child care.

*We found ourselves going back and forth. First, someone would say, well, it's an economic solution we need here, or it's an economic cause of this problem. And then right away someone else would counter with, it's lack of community, it's 'heart' things. What we eventually came up with is that we have to have solutions that are addressed to both sides of the problem, because one or the other isn't going to do it.*

– a community circle participant

### **2. Societal relations and resources**

Suggestions related to social relations focused on communities of faith and sources of information:

Partner churches to offer and encourage multi-cultural experiences for their congregations.

Provide anti-racism training and materials for media staff members.

Work more through communities of faith and rely more on faith-based programs, which are [often] more successful than comparable secular programs.

Keep public libraries open for longer hours, especially evenings and weekends.

*Congregations need to move 'outside the congregational walls.'*

– a community circle participant

### **3. Housing and neighborhoods**

The most logical breakdown of potential solutions in this category is between housing and neighborhoods.

#### **Housing:**

Mix small apartment buildings with other housing types in new developments.

Allow mixed-use zoning that permits people to live, for example, above stores.  
 Increase the flexibility of various codes to assist large families, for example by allowing three persons in each bedroom.  
 Increase the number of duplexes and triplexes with resident owners.  
 Fund experiments in shared living.  
 Expand the supply of transitional housing.  
 Experiment with ways to reduce the profit motive vis-a-vis construction and rehabilitation of affordable housing.  
 Reinstigate some kind of fair-share housing requirement regionwide.  
 Put teeth in the Livable Communities Act and the Community Reinvestment Act.  
 Provide better and more consistent code enforcement.  
 Increase resources to make landlords accountable for repairs and treatment of tenants.  
 Offer more widespread down-payment assistance to persons of limited means.  
 Couple household support programs with housing choice and subsidy.  
 Test "money circles" as a source of funding for home improvements and other family/household needs.  
 Experiment with payment-assistance programs, similar to existing utility-assistance programs (e.g., voluntary payments by utility customers to help those in need).

**Neighborhoods:**

Pair seniors and young parents so they can get to know one another and exchange services, for example swapping occasional child care for lawn mowing  
 Expand and support Neighborhood Watch programs.  
 Improve emergency support systems, as well as awareness of and access to them.

*People like to be with people like themselves.*  
 – a community circle participant

**4. Education**

Ideas for improving public education ran the gamut from those promoting general improvement for all students, regardless of race or socioeconomic status, to those specifically targeting at-risk youngsters from a wide variety of backgrounds. These suggestions fell into several groupings: curriculum and teaching, student support, school choice, recognition of diversity and community relations.

*If we go back to neighborhood schools, poverty areas must have the best, strongest teachers.*  
 – a community circle participant

**Curriculum and teaching improvements:**

Teach all students life skills, such as money management, parenting, how to look for a job and how to select appropriate housing.  
 Eliminate state curriculum standards except for testing.  
 Require academic tests at the elementary, middle-junior high and senior high school levels.  
 Rate schools on academic achievement.  
 Develop different learning tracks, including at least one that provides a good education to those who will not go to [an academic]college.  
 Expand work-study opportunities that do not allow teen-agers to work in fast-food places – for

example, home construction/rehabilitation.  
Encourage/recruit corporate sponsorships and internships. Involve businesses in helping students better visualize careers and career paths and learn the skills they will need.  
Educate students for civic participation.  
Require community-service hours, even before high school.  
Equalize school-district spending per child.  
Lengthen both the school day and the school year.

*It is time to leave the premise that everyone is qualified to attend college.  
It is very important for our country to have mechanics, plumbers, carpenters  
and others who perform such useful tasks. Dignity is in all work  
and unfortunately that has been lost.*

– a community circle participant

**Student support:**

Move away from a “fix the kid” approach to a “fix the system” approach.  
Enhance programs that prevent drop-outs.  
Offer more tutoring.  
Expand mentoring programs.  
Expand after-school activities, especially in the fine and performing arts and other non-athletic program areas.  
Get truants off the streets and into a community center, workplace or community-service setting.  
Require uniforms (although not necessarily “traditional” ones).  
Provide better and more plentiful counseling that is more holistic and incorporates help with chemical abuse.  
Sponsor “burning issues” clubs, lunches or other time to help youngsters deal with issues at home.

*Kids are afraid to go to school because of racism, they're afraid because of sexism, homophobia . . . When they're there, the children are so worried about, am I going to get to my next class, am I going to get home, am I going to get beat up on the way home, am I going to have my lunch money for lunch – that learning is secondary.*

– a community circle participant

**School choice:**

Allow children to go to any [public] school they want.  
Support community schools – “stop busing madness.”  
“Bus for programs, not for numbers.”

*Teachers in the public school system are very unprepared for kids of color.  
Training needs to address not only multiculturalism but it needs to address some of the factors of poverty and how they impact on kids. They need to look at learning styles.  
They need to look at how they as teachers can facilitate involvement by parents and community members.*

– a community circle participant

**Diversity:**

Fund learning opportunities that bring together or pair students from divergent backgrounds.

Use instruction and programs focused on the environment and ecology to bring together all groups in the community in a common concern and in common enterprise.

Train teachers in cultural competency.

Imbue the curriculum with diversity, rather than making diversity a "special event" or giving it superficial treatment.

Offer scholarships to students of color who agree to come back and teach for a minimum period of time.

**Community relations:**

Experiment with "peer parent" and buddy programs that help newcomers feel less isolated and become more involved in their children's schools.

Strengthen the non-educational/pre-school support system that helps to relieve problems in the schools, which consists of programs like Head Start, parenting education, mentoring, quality child care and non-school recreation.

Incorporate community facilities, such as community centers, social service centers and health-care facilities, within or adjacent to schools to give everyone a "stake" in the success of those schools.

*I remember when there were three black teachers in the Minneapolis public schools.  
And yet there were students of color that were going through that school system,  
combating racism as individuals, and going on to become successful participants in society.  
We can blame a lot of things on racism, but let's not fall into the trap of using that  
as an excuse for a lack of achievement.*

*– a community circle participant*

## IV. Preparing for the Future

*I think a lot of white people believe, but sometimes don't feel that we can say it, that racism is probably a relatively minor cause of the relatively poor performance of minority kids . . . . It would be incredibly naive to discount the impact of racism on minority kids in our schools, but it seems to me far more significant causes are the breakdown of the African-American family and the lack of role models for young kids. And the sports culture I think is even more important than racism, the idolization of athletes, and the belief that African-American boys in the Minneapolis public schools have – something like 85 percent feel they can have careers in professional sports . . . . But we don't ever talk about any of those other issues.*

– a community circle participant

An important and meaningful dialogue has begun, all across the Twin Cities, and people of good will from all backgrounds are thinking about economic and racial disparities with great intensity.

The community circles generated a profile of many of the important issues. The Community Circle Reports (Section III of this report) contain a wealth of information, insights and ideas that can be used to propel further exploration of the role of race, changing economics and spatial segregation of housing and education throughout the region. They also developed a long and varied list of action ideas.

The community circle process also proved its value through the responses of most participants, who viewed it as a valuable experience they would like to continue or repeat.

There were, however, some weaknesses in the first round of community circles, including a lower level of action outcomes than in similar programs in other communities. This section of the report provides some analysis of the program and recommendations for the second round of community circles.

### **Recommendation #1: Strengthen the action component**

As is evident in Section III of this report, community circle participants talked a great deal about action. They developed long lists of action ideas, in the areas of employment and opportunity, societal relations and resources, housing and neighborhoods, and education. Unfortunately, it appears that few of those participants went on to try to implement any of the action ideas. It is also unclear whether the views of participants had any effect on public policy decisions. This runs counter to what could be expected based on the results of study circle programs in other communities.

#### **A. Improve the final session of the guide**

The final session of the *Choices for Community* guide, which was used in all the community circles, led participants through a process of listing the areas of tension or conflict and the areas of agreement that they had come to in their discussions. The volunteer recorder in each group was then asked to summarize these thoughts on a record that was submitted to the Community Circle Collaborative.

In study circle guides produced by the Study Circles Resource Center, the final session includes a range of action ideas, divided into categories according to what individuals can do, what small groups can do, what institutions can do, and what communities as a whole can do. Those action lists reflect a range of political viewpoints and are meant simply to assist the study circle in its brainstorming about what action ideas fit best in their community.

The final session of the revised *Choices for Community* guide should include such a list, as well as discussion questions that help participants prioritize those ideas and think about what roles they can play on the neighborhood, community, and regional level.

### **B. Improve the recording process**

Good records from each community circle can be a valuable asset for structuring an action forum, preparing a report that condenses the deliberations, and giving policy input to public officials.

The records submitted from the community circles varied widely in their length, focus, and level of detail. A certain amount of unevenness is to be expected, but more consistency and uniformity would have been extremely helpful. The new *Choices for Community* guide should include simple forms built into each session, giving each recorder specific guidance in how they report the findings of the group.

For the next round, the facilitators should be asked to lead their groups through a summarizing process at the end of each session. This brings the wisdom of the whole group to bear in the recording process, and ensures that the records capture the ideas of the group and the spirit of collaboration.

### **C. Hold a true action forum**

In May 1997, a forum was held for the participants in the first round of community circles. Due to scheduling constraints, that forum occurred before all of the groups had finished their four sessions of deliberation. More importantly, the forum was not structured as an action forum; rather, it was intended to create a large-group deliberation on segregation issues. While some attendees learned a great deal at the forum, it did not prove to be a springboard for action efforts.

A true action forum should be held at the conclusion of the second round of community circles. The Study Circles Resource Center suggests:

“The action forum at the end of each round of study circles is your most important opportunity to galvanize problem solving efforts. At the kickoff, announce the date of the action forum. Invite the study circle participants, coalition members, area organizations working on the issue, and other community members. Use the study circle records to identify themes which emerged from the groups. At the action forum, give people the opportunity to sign up for task forces on those themes. For example, the task forces for a program on race might focus on themes such as improving police-community relations, reducing bias crime, and dealing with race relations among young people. Ask people with some professional expertise in each topic to join that task force. If you are writing a report based on the study circle records, the action forum is an excellent time to release it.

After the action forum, it is critical for program organizers to stay in touch with the task forces. Help them get off the ground by identifying convenors and setting meeting dates. To keep task force efforts in the public eye, create a newsletter which reports on their progress, and encourage newspapers and television stations to cover their work. Provide ways for newcomers to join task forces as the program moves along. The study circle program in Lima, Ohio, went even further, winning a grant from the Ohio Bureau of Justice Services to fund a Violence Prevention Center. The Center was designed to provide staff time to support the eleven task forces which arose from the study circle program. Finally, it is important to celebrate the task force achievements and build on them. One way to do this is through periodic large-group meetings.”

– excerpted from *Focus on Study Circles*, Winter 1998

#### **D. Include more policymakers in the study circles**

The experience of other communities has shown that a study circle program has its greatest effect on policymaking if public officials themselves are among the participants in the groups. In that way, their authority and expertise is brought into the process, but public officials are treated like fellow human beings rather than experts who have the potential to solve problems by themselves. Their wisdom is included in the mix, but they are not put on the spot. Rather than being treated as the distant recipients of formalized public input, they are treated as powerful collaborators in addressing common problems. Public officials have the chance to hear the concerns of real citizens and realize that citizens are capable of addressing complex issues.

#### **Recommendation #2: Create circles which include both city-dwellers and suburbanites**

One of the most innovative aspects of the Community Circle Collaborative program is its focus on regional issues. Segregation in housing and education is an issue with a regional scope, requiring deliberation and action by people in multiple communities. However, the majority of the community circles were limited to people who lived or worked in a particular area. This made it much more difficult for suburbanites to understand the concerns of city-dwellers, and vice versa.

During the second round, institutions could be paired so that each study circle included people from more than one community. For example, a church in Minneapolis with 10 people signed up to participate could be paired with a suburban Kiwanis Club bringing 10 people. The institutions could meet at either site (or an alternate site), and split their pool of 20 people into two community circles.

Another strategy which could be used along with or instead of the pairing approach would be to locate all the community circles at "sectional" sites. The Twin Cities region could be divided into sections like the spokes of a wheel, with each section including some urban areas as well as second- and third-ring suburbs. All the participants for that section could meet at a large facility with many rooms, such as a school, college campus, library, or community center. On the first evening, participants could be assigned to diverse community circles on the spot. Since multiple circles would be meeting on the same evening in the same building, participants could be brought together for a brief reporting session (20 minutes) at the end of each session. This strategy was used successfully in a study circle program in Oklahoma, where it also ensured greater media coverage since reporters could attend the reporting sessions and get a quick snapshot of the deliberations.

Community circles with a mix of urbanites and suburbanites would probably make the experience more unique, illuminating, and exciting for participants. In addition, action groups or task forces which emerged from the action forum or the community circles themselves would be more likely to combine city-dwellers and suburbanites. That kind of cooperation, in itself, would make a statement to the rest of the region.

#### **Recommendation #3: Improving racial, ethnic, and gender diversity**

##### **A. Race and ethnicity**

The full group of participants (350+) was fairly representative of the Twin Cities community as a whole in terms of race/ethnicity. However, individual groups did not reflect this diversity. As a result, some participants perceived that the process was not representative. A number of comments were made regarding how "the right people aren't here."

The suggestions contained in Recommendation #2, above, would help address this problem. However, the

Community Circles Collaborative might also expand further, recruiting organizations representing constituencies which weren't adequately represented in the first round. These could include service clubs and congregations that are known to appeal to members of particular groups. Pairing congregations and other sponsoring organizations to promote racial and ethnic intermingling would be a good measure, even if the urban-suburban strategy mentioned above is not utilized. A third approach would involve deliberately assigning volunteers of one ethnicity to join a discussion group dominated by another. Because it is safe to presume that the vast majority of participants are persons of good will and intent, finding volunteers willing to cross barriers should not be difficult.

## **B. Gender**

The group of participants as a whole was not well-balanced by gender. Men made up only about one-fourth of the participants. The all-female memberships of a couple of study circles even remarked on the absence of male counterparts and asked what could be done to "get the men here."

Although gender imbalance is not uncommon for a volunteer group of this type, gender imbalance needs to be addressed in the next round of circles. One possible approach would be to specifically invite participation by male-dominated clubs or the men's groups from various faith communities.

### **Recommendation #4: Give more training and support to facilitators**

The reports from the circles, and the surveys completed by the facilitators themselves, suggest that the quality of facilitation was uneven. This is one of the potential pitfalls of using volunteers, but it need not be a fatal one.

EHEP could turn to professional facilitators to conduct the next round of meetings, but this is not necessary nor even particularly wise. What is needed is better training and support for volunteer facilitators. For example, at least one facilitator complained that the group he or she led frequently strayed from the topic – without any apparent understanding that it is the job of the facilitator to keep the group focused and moving, so it can produce the results it wants within the allotted time.

The facilitator training process and packet reflect this failure to teach the basics. Training emphasized the content of the sessions and cultural considerations – both critical topics, to be sure, but not to the exclusion of learning how to lead a productive meeting, keep the group focused, mediate conflict, and handle difficult people ("difficult" here referring to any number of problems, including glibness, silence, stonewalling, attempts to dominate, etc.).

*Getting people involved in addressing public issues is not a "nice" thing. . . .  
What you want people to say is not that it is a nice thing to do  
but that it's an absolutely necessary thing to do.*

*– Martha McCoy, Study Circles Resource Center*

Given that some of the facilitators are relatively inexperienced, using co-facilitators might be invaluable. Experienced facilitators could be paired with facilitators who are new to the process. Pairing facilitators of different ethnicities (or a young person and an adult) would also make a statement to the participants about the inclusivity of the project.

Having a monitor present to step in and redirect the group's energy might also be helpful. A monitor can keep an eye on several groups at a time and keep tabs on the clock as well. The monitor's presence allows each facilitator to engage fully in the group's discussion and ensure that both substance and direction

remain relevant. Moreover, should any facilitator encounter difficulty with a particular group – belligerence, refusal to focus, etc. – someone else is present to mediate and help the group get moving in positive ways again. The presence of a monitor can aid neophyte and experienced facilitators alike.

In CCC's case, the difficulties in using monitors are logistical: If each group is meeting at its own place and time, it is simply infeasible for a single monitor to be present. Neither would this be an efficient use of anyone's time. Moreover, the number of monitors available will necessarily be limited by the need for each one to be highly experienced in facilitation and/or team leadership. These difficulties could be overcome through a different approach to scheduling discussions.

#### **Recommendation #5: Schedule all meeting times in advance**

Ironically, it is possible that individual groups were given *too much* latitude in scheduling their own meetings – which means that each person's dentist appointment, TV viewing habits, softball league, family demands, vacation and other prior commitments interfered with circle meetings. Multiply this effect by ten or fifteen circle members, and it becomes clear why scheduling was a problem.

Rather than leaving the scheduling decision wide open, it may be more effective to set up group meeting times in advance. For example, meetings in each round of discussions could be slated to take place at one of four or five predetermined times at one of four or five predetermined locations. Discussants would be asked to select one of those times and places to participate, either for the entire series or on a meeting-by-meeting basis. Advance sign-ups would probably be necessary in order to make sure that all time slots have enough participants; otherwise, intended participants would have to be notified of a change in plans.

Although this approach might entail some additional work on the part of the organizers, it might also eliminate some work by eliminating confusion about who is meeting where, and when. Moreover, sponsoring organizations would remain heavily involved in coordinating meetings and keeping track of participants.

Adopting an approach similar to this one could produce several benefits:

- It would impose some discipline on the groups and indicate that the study circles are not a social event that takes place only when everyone is free, but a formalized process with demands of its own.
- It would allow coordinators to balance the sizes of the circles, eliminating problems caused by poor attendance in some groups while others overflow.
- It would allow individuals who might miss one set time to "make up" a session at a different time, thus facilitating participation in the entire series of discussions.
- It would allow individuals to sample different locations, if desired, thus exposing them to a much wider range of viewpoints and ideas.
- It would enable the circle coordinators at any given location to balance racial and gender representation more effectively, either by pairing sponsoring organizations or by randomly assigning incoming individuals to different discussion groups.
- It would allow for the efficient use of monitors in support of facilitators.
- It would put everyone on essentially the same timetable, with a clear beginning and a clear end.

One potential drawback to this approach is that some groups would lose the continuity and, hence, the familiarity that foster trust and openness. However, the process itself can help to encourage such openness. Moreover, most discussion groups will probably remain essentially intact throughout the entire series due to individual choices.

# **Community Circle Collaborative**

## **Lead Partner**

Education and Housing Equity Project

## **Organizing Partners**

Citizens League  
City of Minneapolis, Office of the Mayor  
Institute on Race and Poverty, University of Minnesota  
INTER-RACE, Augsburg College  
Macalester College Department of Urban Studies  
Metropolitan Interfaith Council on Affordable Housing  
Minneapolis Initiative Against Racism  
Minneapolis Public Schools  
Minneapolis Neighborhood Revitalization Program  
Minnesota Minority Education Partnership  
Minnesota Public Radio Civic Journalism Project  
Minnesota Churches Anti-Racism Initiative of the  
Greater Minneapolis, Minnesota, and Saint Paul Area Councils of Churches  
Minnesota Fair Housing Center  
Minnesota Meeting  
People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, North Chapter  
Southside Neighborhood Housing Services  
Twin Cities Free-Net  
Urban Coalition  
West Metro Education Project

## **Funding Partners**

Bremer Foundation  
Bush Foundation  
Center for Urban and Regional Affairs  
Minneapolis Foundation  
Saint Paul Foundation

## **National Partners**

Study Circles Resource Center  
Kettering Foundation/National Issues Forum

In addition to the organizing and funding partners, many partner organizations and individuals are joining the collaborative as resource partners, facilitators, and as sponsors of the community circles being convened throughout the metropolitan area.

# **The Choices for Community Project**

## ***A Report on the First Round of Community Circles***

“We need to develop a regional civics that is not about governmental entities. It’s about citizens, community groups, businesses, and government agencies coming together to act in the common interest of the region.”

– William Barnes, coauthor of *The U.S. Common Market*

### **I. Executive Summary: Principal Findings and Directions for the Future**

A great experiment in democracy is underway in Minneapolis/St. Paul. Since December 1996, over 350 residents of the Twin Cities metropolitan area have been involved in the Choices for Community program, the first effort of its kind to bring citizens of an entire *region* together to deliberate on difficult regional issues. The program is being organized by the Community Circle Collaborative, a cross-sector coalition of over 30 Twin Cities organizations.

In their Community Circles – small, participatory, democratic discussions – citizens addressed issues surrounding educational and residential segregation. Participants shared their hopes, concerns, and recommendations at a Community Forum held in May 1997.

This fall, another round of Community Circles will begin. The program’s organizers and sponsoring organizations are determined to bring many more people into these vital discussions. Based on findings from the first round, the program will also facilitate more opportunities for participants to join in implementing the solutions they develop. With the foundation laid in the first year, the second will become a greater springboard for action at the neighborhood and community levels.

## II. Background: The Community Circle Collaborative

*"It couldn't happen here." Not in Minneapolis-St. Paul, the political home of Hubert Humphrey: Minnesota, America's sane heartland. . . . The Twin Cities was immune to urban decline, inner-suburban decay, urban sprawl – and the polarization that has devastated and divided older, larger regions. After all, we were not Chicago, Detroit, or Milwaukee. We were reform minded, and our philanthropic and governmental centers were coordinated and responsive. Then the 1980s hit, marking our Twin Cities with identical patterns of regional polarization. . . . If it could happen here, no American region is immune. Once polarization occurs, the concentration of poverty, disinvestment, middle-class flight, and urban sprawl grow more and more severe.*

*-- Myron Orfield, *Metropolitics* (1997: 1, emphasis added)*

State Legislator Myron Orfield was one of the first citizens in the region to realize that Twin Cities communities were becoming increasingly polarized along the lines of race and class. Changes in regional school districts pointed to serious issues of equity in both housing access and public education.

It is within this context that the Community Circle Collaborative (CCC) was launched. CCC is a metro-wide dialogue project that engages citizens from all walks of life, 8-12 at a time, in study circles held throughout the metro area. Originally a partnership among EHEP, the Minneapolis Initiative Against Racism (MIAR), the Minnesota Minority Education Partnership (MMEP), and the Minnesota Fair Housing Center, the CCC initiative has expanded into a wide-ranging coalition of community-based organizations, public staff and officials, and individuals working in a variety of fields, including social justice, race relations, housing, education, religion, law and social research.

The Collaborative's members were united by their interest in two central questions:

- What are the impacts of existing patterns of residential, economic and racial segregation on the educational achievement and life opportunities of Twin Cities area children and families?
- What can or should we do, as individuals and as a community, to enhance educational success and housing and economic opportunities for *all* children in the Twin Cities area?

*The diversity in our state is greatest among children . . . . So this is a long curve. We'd better start getting some of the answers right now, because they're going to affect an entire generation.*

*– Vivian Jenkins Nelsen, INTER-RACE*

### A. What is a Community Circle?

The Community Circle process is one way help a community achieve new levels of citizenship and civic action. Large-scale Choices for Community programs – often referred to as study circle programs – have been used all over the country to generate reasoned dialogue, decisive policy input, and grass-roots problem-solving.

The impacts of these programs range from new friendships, to neighborhood projects, to city-wide action plans, to new legislation. An evaluation of a study circle program in Greater Cleveland showed basic changes in attitude as a result of the study circles. Study circle participants in Lima, Ohio have done everything from building new playgrounds to changing the makeup of a regional development board. A

state-wide study circle program in Oklahoma helped the state legislature enact sweeping changes in the criminal system.

Community circles, or study circles, are democratic, highly participatory discussion groups which meet several times to address a critical public issue. The discussions are facilitated, and they follow a framework laid out in a discussion guide specific to that issue. The participants talk about how the issue affects them, then consider some of the larger questions surrounding the issue, and, finally, discuss how they might take action on the issue. Successful organizers have been able to mobilize large numbers of citizens – a “community-wide” program in a medium-sized city can involve roughly 1,000 people in 75-100 circles.

While community-wide study circle programs have taken place in many cities and towns, and state-wide study circle programs have taken place in Maine and Oklahoma, the Twin Cities Community Circles project is the first attempt at a region-wide program. With the ascendance of regional issues such as segregation, urban sprawl, and transportation to the forefront of policy debates across the nation, a region-wide model is a much-needed innovation.

*We face our greatest challenges at the neighborhood, regional, and global levels. Our governments are structured to address challenges at the local, state, and national levels.*  
– William Dodge, *Regional Excellence*

Why are these public conversations so unusual? In part, it's because most of what we see today in the media and in public meetings is “positioning” or “posturing.” The purpose of this style is to advocate one point of view or another, at the expense of dialogue and, often, of decorum. Although widely accepted in the media, this type of communication ultimately leads to public cynicism and withdrawal from the political process. Not many people want to compete in such a contrived forum. Community circles offer a refreshing change from the narrow and often restrictive discussions of the past and the competitive debates encouraged by the political process.

*People acting as citizens create new ways of working together and new ways of taking responsibility for what is publicly all of ours.*  
– Dick Little, Education and Housing Equity Project

The community circles process recognizes that agreement is not necessary in order for a conversation to be successful. It is necessary for participants to listen, reflect, and speak from both the head and the heart. Mutual respect and a belief in the enlightening and healing nature of sharing ideas – across boundaries of ethnicity, geography, age, gender, socioeconomic status and even language – can go a long way toward making a conversation rewarding for the community as well as the individuals involved.

In many cultures, circles are symbols of equality, fairness and completeness. The underlying premise of the Community Circles Collaborative process is that solutions to serious and often divisive issues can be found if we put aside our fears and prejudices and work together.

## **B. The Need: Residential and Educational Segregation in the Twin Cities**

The Education and Housing Equity Project (EHEP), the [lead?] partner in the Community Circle Collaborative, was created in early 1995 by a group of education and housing advocates who shared a belief in the pressing need to link the issue of school desegregation with the broader issue of housing and neighborhood segregation. EHEP's mission is to act as a catalyst to build broad-based coalitions and

engage the community in public conversations about and advocacy for promotion of racially and economically inclusive communities that give families of all incomes, races and ethnic backgrounds access to schools and housing throughout the metropolitan area.

*The reason it's critical that we talk is because words have different meanings to different people, and we have different levels of interpretation and reflection from our own experience, our history, our expectations, our own knowledge of where we can go.*

– Dr. Josie Johnson

A few alarming facts highlight the nature and depth of the concerns they wished to address:

- The proportion of people of color who live in poverty is higher in Minneapolis/St. Paul than in any other central city in the nation: 37 percent of African-Americans, 40 percent of Native Americans, 32 percent of Latinos.
- Concentrations of poverty and income disparities between the region's central cities and its suburbs are also among the highest in the nation. The poverty rate in Minneapolis is 18.5 percent, in St. Paul 16.7 percent, but in the suburbs it is only 4.5 percent.
- The central cities are home to only 22 percent of the children enrolled in regional schools, but to 55 percent of the region's impoverished elementary school children.
- Between 1970 and 1984, the population of the metro area increased by 9.7 percent but the land it occupied increased by 25.1 percent.

The organizations which have joined the Community Circle Collaborative may have widely-diverging views about how to solve these problems. However, all of the partners share a common concern about the issue of segregation, and a commitment that residents of the Twin Cities region must be actively engaged in addressing it.

*We know that poverty isn't going anywhere, and racism isn't dead.*

– Vivian Jenkins Nelsen, INTER-RACE

### C. Chronology of CCC Events

The Community Circle Collaborative is now more than a year old. A brief chronology of its activities and related events appears below.

**December 1996:** The "Beyond Busing" Kick-Off Forum was held for project sponsors. This event was attended by more than 100 people representing a wide variety of organizations: churches, advocacy groups, academia, public agencies and foundations. Significantly, the event took place in the suburbs (in the St. Louis Park City Council chambers), making it clear from the beginning that this was not a central-city effort but a metro-wide effort. The first two speakers, former St. Paul Mayor George Latimer and education expert Josie Johnson, Ph.D., helped to set the context of the project and to encourage and motivate participants. The two speakers who followed them, Curt Johnson, chair of the Metropolitan Council; and Yusef Mgeni, President of the Urban Coalition, provided information and insights regarding the breadth and depth of segregation problems and costs in the metropolitan area. Following the speakers, individuals representing the state legislature, an outer-ring suburban church, an inner-ring suburban school, a nonprofit housing developer, the media and the Minneapolis Mayor's Office all described why

they planned to participate in the project and urged others to join them. As the event concluded, many new sponsors submitted their pledges to participate by organizing study circles.

**February 1997:** Training for study-circle facilitators was held, and the first Discussion Guide for participants was issued.

**March-June 1997:** Study circle discussion groups met 3-5 times each to discuss the two questions given above. Each group produced a brief report summarizing its discussion and findings. Nearly 350 people participated in these discussions.

**May 1997:** CCC held a Community Forum at Macalester College in St. Paul. This forum was attended by many of the individuals who had participated in study circles and gave them a chance not only to share the results of their deliberations and but also to explore the extent of commonalities among the different groups. The Forum featured Martha McCoy, the Executive Director of the (national) Study Circles Resource Center, whose presentation was followed by two "conversations." The first, moderated by Vivian Jenkins Nelsen, President and CEO of INTER-RACE, focused on the first study-circle question (regarding impacts); the second, moderated by George Latimer, addressed the second question, which focuses on potential solutions. (Section III of this report summarizes the findings of all the study circles.)

**June 1997:** The Institute on Race and Poverty delivers to the McKnight Foundation a report entitled "Examining the Relationship Between Housing, Education, and Persistent Segregation." This report identifies the Twin Cities region as one of the ten most segregated metropolitan regions in the United States.

*The Twin Cities have reached an important time to consider which path it will follow. This community has already begun to creep down the path so familiar to many large urban areas. If the Twin Cities community is to reverse its course, it must begin now. This community must seriously examine and confront what is happening here, and it must come together for real, proven solutions.*

– The Institute on Race and Poverty, University of Minnesota

**July 1997:** All study circle reports were submitted to EHEP. In addition, facilitators and group organizers completed a questionnaire intended to help the study-circle organizers to learn more about the process – successes as well as difficulties – and to glean suggestions concerning how better to proceed in the next round of discussions.

**July-October 1997:** Individual participants who represented interested groups made presentations to their respective organizations, local communities and constituencies.

**September 1997:** The National Conference on Race Relations and America's Public Education System takes place. One of the discussion sites is the Twin Cities. Among the practical issues identified are housing segregation, economic inequity, and the need for long-term solutions rather than quick fixes.

**April 1998:** The final report of the first round of study circles, "Beyond Busing: The First Metrowide Dialogue on the Challenges of Education and Housing Segregation," is issued.

### III. Study Circle Reports

#### A. Issues

*We are in very deep denial. We believe we aren't like Detroit, but we are;  
it's just happening more slowly here.*

– a community circle participant

The necessary first step in trying to solve thorny social problems is to ensure that those problems are understood in much the same way by all. Therefore, the Community Circles focused their attention first on identifying the issues.

The problem areas identified by CCC participants fell into four fairly distinct groupings:

- Issues related to regional growth and equity in terms of investment, employment and social relations;
- Systemic issues related to housing segregation and neighborhood quality;
- Systemic issues related to education; and
- Issues that arise primarily at the level of the individual.

A small degree of liberty has been taken to clarify meaning or to combine similar thoughts expressed in different ways by more than one participant or study circle. Every effort has been made, however, to retain the essence of what appeared in the study circle reports.

Issues shown in italic type were identified by more than one study group.

#### *1. Issues of regional growth and equity*

When asked to determine how many societies the Twin Cities have become, people responded in two different ways. One group suggested that we have become “three societies: The very rich, working people, and the poor.” Another described it differently: “Two – those who work and those who don’t.” Regardless of how it is said, though, there was a strong recognition among participants that the region has become polarized into distinct, and often mutually distrusting, camps.

The issues that appear in this grouping deal with the broad context of regional equity – and inequity. They cluster around three topics: investment, employment and social relations.

##### **Investment:**

- Spatial mismatch between available fiscal and economic resources and high-order fiscal and social needs – for example, northern part of region needs more infrastructure
- Biases in business lending that shortchange women- and minority-owned businesses
- Need for more entrepreneurship programs, e.g., micro-loans, money circles
- Perceived and real disadvantages of central-city sites, due to crime, presence of pollutants and an unskilled workforce*
- A focus on the short-term and the bottom line, disregarding long-standing evidence that a “rising tide” does not lift all boats*
- Shortage of businesses that are committed to being good corporate citizens
- Growth containment affects provision and cost of infrastructure

*Suburbanites like to have the benefits of the city but do not like to pay for them.*  
– a community circle participant

**Employment:**

*Spatial mismatch between available jobs and many of the unemployed – e.g., the northern part of the region needs to provide more jobs*  
Biases in job hiring and wage-setting practices  
Shortage of reverse-commute options that can take inner-city workers to suburban jobs  
*Shortage of quality affordable child care, especially at “non-traditional” work times*  
Changing workforce demographics: more persons of color, more seniors, more women supporting households  
Challenge presented by people who are physically or psychologically unable to “work a 9-5 job”  
Under-recognition by business that well-trained employees lead to greater profitability  
*Lack of benefits with many part-time and low-wage jobs*  
Jobs accessible to residents of poor communities often go to outsiders  
Lack of sufficient interest in and support for entrepreneurship in minority and poor communities

**Social relations:**

*Distortions and stereotypes in media reporting*  
*Reporting of crime that is disproportionate to its occurrence*  
Need for true justice that is timely, fair and makes wise use of parole and community-service options  
Polarization reinforced by racial categories on government forms  
General breakdown of family structure and cohesion due to economic demands, lifestyle choices, decline in community support  
Perceived need to keep track of people with criminal records (e.g., community right-to-know regulations for known sex offenders)  
Tendency for people to remain close to their support networks  
*Decline in traditional values, especially a decline in personal integrity and responsibility*  
Lack of courage to make wise but unpopular decisions

*Churches can perpetuate values but are not always good role models.*  
– a community circle participant

**2. Systemic issues related to housing and neighborhoods**

There was a generally high level of consensus on housing and neighborhood issues, which clustered around two topics: housing stock and neighborhood environment. By far the most often-cited issue was that of exclusionary suburban zoning and development practices, which were mentioned specifically by one-fourth of the reporting groups.

*The people who can afford to pay taxes live out in the suburbs, and the inner city has been getting poorer and poorer. It will continue until there is some massive political determination that we're going to make our inner cities the most attractive places to live, or at least as attractive for all kinds of people as the suburbs are.*  
– a community circle participant

**Housing:**

Lack of investment in poor or declining neighborhoods  
Poor housing stock that repels stable families, discourages investment  
Lead-based paint and other health hazards  
Lack of neighborhood diversity in housing types, which leads to homogeneous populations  
*Inflexible central-city zoning and other regulations that prohibit use of many vacant/  
abandoned buildings as shelter*  
*Shortage of affordable housing*  
Punitive rental property taxes  
High cost of land  
Poor enforcement of existing fair housing laws  
Lack of awareness of opportunities and options among low-income households

*In Minneapolis, the government is sponsoring the destruction of affordable housing,  
through zoning, through licensing, through housing codes. The city has destroyed  
countless affordable neighborhoods.*

– a community circle participant

**Neighborhood environment:**

*Unequal power in neighborhood/community relations*  
Inadequate resources for general maintenance, including trash pick-up and yardwork  
Lack of resources to facilitate neighborhood involvement  
*Transience caused by poor housing stock, low incomes*  
Land-use plans that give highest priority to accommodating cars (e.g., intrusive highway routes)  
*Inadequate transit service (frequency, hours, direct routing and choice of destinations)*  
*Exclusionary suburban zoning regulations (e.g., minimum lot size and square footage,  
garage requirements, development fees)*  
*Redlining (insurance, lending, cab service, police response)*  
*Crime and perceptions of crime*  
Need to improve conditions for those who “remain behind”

*More affluent neighborhoods [have] essentially accepted socioeconomic redlining.*

– a community circle participant

**3. Systemic issues related to education**

Perspectives on the shortcomings of the educational system were quite diverse but fall into two groupings: One focuses on the in-school experience, the other on the interaction between the school and the surrounding community.

**The school as educational institution:**

Teachers not living in the community  
Few opportunities to experience diversity  
Institutional discrimination: students receiving differential treatment due to race/color, learning ability, economic status, perceived intelligence, and/or athletic ability, which can lead to artificially raised or lowered expectations  
Focus on short-term results when long-term solutions are needed  
Failure to teach the basics  
Lack of adequate [curriculum] structure

Classes that are too big  
Inability to sustain children's enthusiasm for school beyond 3rd or 4th grade  
Too few minority teachers  
Insufficient counselors and inadequate counseling  
Schools being asked to do far more than teach academics  
Lack of effective means of dealing with children from problem situations; at-risk children  
"falling through the cracks"

*Where we do get the minorities to move out into the suburbs, they have the money, they have the wherewithal, but we . . . have a problem in the sensitivity of our teachers and our educational system . . . One of the biggest problems that [minority kids] are finding is that their teachers are prejudiced. So we move out into the suburbs, and what we encounter are teachers who will not be fair with these kids . . . They're also scared of being in school, because they're afraid of being called names, and if there's a fight, they get kicked out. So there's a racial imbalance.*  
– a community circle participant

#### **The school in the community:**

The school system is not user-friendly or parent-friendly  
Transience disrupting children's stability, ability to learn  
School violence (e.g., children carrying weapons)  
Unequal distribution of school resources, both within and between school districts  
Perception that central-city schools are underfunded  
Special challenges presented by schools impacted by concentrated poverty  
Lack of adequate transportation/transit, which results in reduced access to extra-curricular activities and school choice  
The public-school monopoly – lack of competition and choice  
Poor nutrition among school children  
Language barriers among recent immigrants  
Under-educated, over-worked parents who cannot adequately help their children  
[Household] stability affects academic achievement  
Need for transitional housing to support schools

*You can't learn if you are hungry.*  
– a community circle participant

#### **4. Issues related to individuals**

These issues reflect more general concerns about the state of our society as a whole as well as the plight of individuals within it. Some of these issues are pandemic – that is, they plague people in all races, classes and locations; others are more specific to particular circumstances, especially the circumstances of those living in areas of concentrated poverty.

#### **Society-wide issues:**

*Substance abuse and addiction*  
Breakdown in the institution of marriage  
Lack of recognition for different family types, e.g., extended families  
Lack of self-esteem in children due to inadequate parenting  
*Lack of respect for the rights, beliefs and property of others*

Lack of respect for teachers and other elders  
Fear leading to isolation, high levels of stress  
Negative stereotyping  
Racism  
Denial of racism/segregation problem  
Need for more welcoming in the community

*The white teachers don't like us.  
When a white kid does something good, they get praised.  
When we do something good, they say nothing.*

– a community circle participant

**Issues more common in areas of concentrated poverty:**

Low incomes/joblessness leading to extralegal economic activity  
Poor parental supervision of children and lack of other supportive/responsible adults  
Lack of employed role models  
Individuals focused on day-to-day survival unlikely to make education a top priority  
Unwillingness or inability to take personal responsibility (e.g., in housing: use of illegal subleases and presence of unaccounted-for tenants)  
Lack of pride in surroundings  
High level of mobility leading to instability in family, education  
Inability to set and work toward goals  
Entitlement mentality promoted by welfare dependency  
Victim mentality promoted by discrimination and dependency

*Describing the problems of the inner city as a result of abstract 'racism' is not helpful because fighting 'racism' seems a futile exercise.*

– a community circle participant

**B. Potential solutions**

*We decided early on that the issues of housing, education and jobs were not mutually exclusive, and that if we had to do anything, we had to do all of them . . . . One of the things we said is that if the economic bottom line drives the process, then a rising economic tide should diminish segregation. But does it?*

– a community circle participant

The potential solutions that appear here should be regarded as a valuable first cut. As the Community Circles Collaborative proceeds with its second round of discussions, new efforts will be made to help them develop meaningful and effective responses to those issues.

It is also important to remember that many potential solutions are implicit in the issue statements. For example, to address the issue described as “biases in business lending that shortchange women- and minority-owned businesses,” a potential solution might be to work to eliminate those biases, or to find other ways to make more investment capital available to women and minorities.

Again, as was the case with the issues, every attempt has been made to capture the essence of what emerged from the discussants, while also combining and clarifying ideas where appropriate.

*When something isn't working, try something new.*

– a community circle participant

### **1. Employment and opportunity**

Suggestions for increasing employment and economic opportunity generally addressed broad topical categories, such as entrepreneurship and child care.

Adopt the OxFam approach that sets up micro-loan and revolving credit programs (“money circles”) among groups of inner-city residents. This will help to foster entrepreneurship.

Increase funding for women- and minority-owned businesses.

Require basic benefits with all full-time jobs.

Offer incentives to lenders to make business and home loans to low-income persons.

Recruit corporations as community partners that can help to provide transportation to job sites, child care, and job offers to center-city residents.

Improve the transit system by expanding reverse-commute options and using a wider variety of vehicle and service types (e.g., company vans, vanpools, dial-a-ride systems, bus-service rerouting).

Expand the funding for and availability of adequate child care.

*We found ourselves going back and forth. First, someone would say, well, it's an economic solution we need here, or it's an economic cause of this problem. And then right away someone else would counter with, it's lack of community, it's 'heart' things. What we eventually came up with is that we have to have solutions that are addressed to both sides of the problem, because one or the other isn't going to do it.*

– a community circle participant

### **2. Societal relations and resources**

Suggestions related to social relations focused on communities of faith and sources of information:

Partner churches to offer and encourage multi-cultural experiences for their congregations.

Provide anti-racism training and materials for media staff members.

Work more through communities of faith and rely more on faith-based programs, which are [often] more successful than comparable secular programs.

Keep public libraries open for longer hours, especially evenings and weekends.

*Congregations need to move 'outside the congregational walls.'*

– a community circle participant

### **3. Housing and neighborhoods**

The most logical breakdown of potential solutions in this category is between housing and neighborhoods.

#### **Housing:**

Mix small apartment buildings with other housing types in new developments.

Allow mixed-use zoning that permits people to live, for example, above stores.  
 Increase the flexibility of various codes to assist large families, for example by allowing three persons in each bedroom.  
 Increase the number of duplexes and triplexes with resident owners.  
 Fund experiments in shared living.  
 Expand the supply of transitional housing.  
 Experiment with ways to reduce the profit motive vis-a-vis construction and rehabilitation of affordable housing.  
 Reinstigate some kind of fair-share housing requirement regionwide.  
 Put teeth in the Livable Communities Act and the Community Reinvestment Act.  
 Provide better and more consistent code enforcement.  
 Increase resources to make landlords accountable for repairs and treatment of tenants.  
 Offer more widespread down-payment assistance to persons of limited means.  
 Couple household support programs with housing choice and subsidy.  
 Test "money circles" as a source of funding for home improvements and other family/household needs.  
 Experiment with payment-assistance programs, similar to existing utility-assistance programs (e.g., voluntary payments by utility customers to help those in need).

**Neighborhoods:**

Pair seniors and young parents so they can get to know one another and exchange services, for example swapping occasional child care for lawn mowing  
 Expand and support Neighborhood Watch programs.  
 Improve emergency support systems, as well as awareness of and access to them.

*People like to be with people like themselves.*

– a community circle participant

**4. Education**

Ideas for improving public education ran the gamut from those promoting general improvement for all students, regardless of race or socioeconomic status, to those specifically targeting at-risk youngsters from a wide variety of backgrounds. These suggestions fell into several groupings: curriculum and teaching, student support, school choice, recognition of diversity and community relations.

*If we go back to neighborhood schools, poverty areas must have the best, strongest teachers.*

– a community circle participant

**Curriculum and teaching improvements:**

Teach all students life skills, such as money management, parenting, how to look for a job and how to select appropriate housing.  
 Eliminate state curriculum standards except for testing.  
 Require academic tests at the elementary, middle-junior high and senior high school levels.  
 Rate schools on academic achievement.  
 Develop different learning tracks, including at least one that provides a good education to those who will not go to [an academic]college.  
 Expand work-study opportunities that do not allow teen-agers to work in fast-food places – for

example, home construction/rehabilitation.  
Encourage/recruit corporate sponsorships and internships. Involve businesses in helping students better visualize careers and career paths and learn the skills they will need.  
Educate students for civic participation.  
Require community-service hours, even before high school.  
Equalize school-district spending per child.  
Lengthen both the school day and the school year.

*It is time to leave the premise that everyone is qualified to attend college. It is very important for our country to have mechanics, plumbers, carpenters and others who perform such useful tasks. Dignity is in all work and unfortunately that has been lost.*

– a community circle participant

**Student support:**

Move away from a “fix the kid” approach to a “fix the system” approach.  
Enhance programs that prevent drop-outs.  
Offer more tutoring.  
Expand mentoring programs.  
Expand after-school activities, especially in the fine and performing arts and other non-athletic program areas.  
Get truants off the streets and into a community center, workplace or community-service setting.  
Require uniforms (although not necessarily “traditional” ones).  
Provide better and more plentiful counseling that is more holistic and incorporates help with chemical abuse.  
Sponsor “burning issues” clubs, lunches or other time to help youngsters deal with issues at home.

*Kids are afraid to go to school because of racism, they're afraid because of sexism, homophobia . . . When they're there, the children are so worried about, am I going to get to my next class, am I going to get home, am I going to get beat up on the way home, am I going to have my lunch money for lunch – that learning is secondary.*

– a community circle participant

**School choice:**

Allow children to go to any [public] school they want.  
Support community schools – “stop busing madness.”  
“Bus for programs, not for numbers.”

*Teachers in the public school system are very unprepared for kids of color. Training needs to address not only multiculturalism but it needs to address some of the factors of poverty and how they impact on kids. They need to look at learning styles. They need to look at how they as teachers can facilitate involvement by parents and community members.*

– a community circle participant

**Diversity:**

Fund learning opportunities that bring together or pair students from divergent backgrounds.

Use instruction and programs focused on the environment and ecology to bring together all groups in the community in a common concern and in common enterprise.

Train teachers in cultural competency.

Imbue the curriculum with diversity, rather than making diversity a "special event" or giving it superficial treatment.

Offer scholarships to students of color who agree to come back and teach for a minimum period of time.

**Community relations:**

Experiment with "peer parent" and buddy programs that help newcomers feel less isolated and become more involved in their children's schools.

Strengthen the non-educational/pre-school support system that helps to relieve problems in the schools, which consists of programs like Head Start, parenting education, mentoring, quality child care and non-school recreation.

Incorporate community facilities, such as community centers, social service centers and health-care facilities, within or adjacent to schools to give everyone a "stake" in the success of those schools.

*I remember when there were three black teachers in the Minneapolis public schools. And yet there were students of color that were going through that school system, combating racism as individuals, and going on to become successful participants in society. We can blame a lot of things on racism, but let's not fall into the trap of using that as an excuse for a lack of achievement.*

*– a community circle participant*

## IV. Preparing for the Future

*I think a lot of white people believe, but sometimes don't feel that we can say it, that racism is probably a relatively minor cause of the relatively poor performance of minority kids . . . . It would be incredibly naive to discount the impact of racism on minority kids in our schools, but it seems to me far more significant causes are the breakdown of the African-American family and the lack of role models for young kids. And the sports culture I think is even more important than racism, the idolization of athletes, and the belief that African-American boys in the Minneapolis public schools have – something like 85 percent feel they can have careers in professional sports . . . . But we don't ever talk about any of those other issues.*

– a community circle participant

An important and meaningful dialogue has begun, all across the Twin Cities, and people of good will from all backgrounds are thinking about economic and racial disparities with great intensity.

The community circles generated a profile of many of the important issues. The Community Circle Reports (Section III of this report) contain a wealth of information, insights and ideas that can be used to propel further exploration of the role of race, changing economics and spatial segregation of housing and education throughout the region. They also developed a long and varied list of action ideas.

The community circle process also proved its value through the responses of most participants, who viewed it as a valuable experience they would like to continue or repeat.

There were, however, some weaknesses in the first round of community circles, including a lower level of action outcomes than in similar programs in other communities. This section of the report provides some analysis of the program and recommendations for the second round of community circles.

### **Recommendation #1: Strengthen the action component**

As is evident in Section III of this report, community circle participants talked a great deal about action. They developed long lists of action ideas, in the areas of employment and opportunity, societal relations and resources, housing and neighborhoods, and education. Unfortunately, it appears that few of those participants went on to try to implement any of the action ideas. It is also unclear whether the views of participants had any effect on public policy decisions. This runs counter to what could be expected based on the results of study circle programs in other communities.

#### **A. Improve the final session of the guide**

The final session of the *Choices for Community* guide, which was used in all the community circles, led participants through a process of listing the areas of tension or conflict and the areas of agreement that they had come to in their discussions. The volunteer recorder in each group was then asked to summarize these thoughts on a record that was submitted to the Community Circle Collaborative.

In study circle guides produced by the Study Circles Resource Center, the final session includes a range of action ideas, divided into categories according to what individuals can do, what small groups can do, what institutions can do, and what communities as a whole can do. Those action lists reflect a range of political viewpoints and are meant simply to assist the study circle in its brainstorming about what action ideas fit best in their community.

The final session of the revised *Choices for Community* guide should include such a list, as well as discussion questions that help participants prioritize those ideas and think about what roles they can play on the neighborhood, community, and regional level.

### **B. Improve the recording process**

Good records from each community circle can be a valuable asset for structuring an action forum, preparing a report that condenses the deliberations, and giving policy input to public officials.

The records submitted from the community circles varied widely in their length, focus, and level of detail. A certain amount of unevenness is to be expected, but more consistency and uniformity would have been extremely helpful. The new *Choices for Community* guide should include simple forms built into each session, giving each recorder specific guidance in how they report the findings of the group.

For the next round, the facilitators should be asked to lead their groups through a summarizing process at the end of each session. This brings the wisdom of the whole group to bear in the recording process, and ensures that the records capture the ideas of the group and the spirit of collaboration.

### **C. Hold a true action forum**

In May 1997, a forum was held for the participants in the first round of community circles. Due to scheduling constraints, that forum occurred before all of the groups had finished their four sessions of deliberation. More importantly, the forum was not structured as an action forum; rather, it was intended to create a large-group deliberation on segregation issues. While some attendees learned a great deal at the forum, it did not prove to be a springboard for action efforts.

A true action forum should be held at the conclusion of the second round of community circles. The Study Circles Resource Center suggests:

“The action forum at the end of each round of study circles is your most important opportunity to galvanize problem solving efforts. At the kickoff, announce the date of the action forum. Invite the study circle participants, coalition members, area organizations working on the issue, and other community members. Use the study circle records to identify themes which emerged from the groups. At the action forum, give people the opportunity to sign up for task forces on those themes. For example, the task forces for a program on race might focus on themes such as improving police-community relations, reducing bias crime, and dealing with race relations among young people. Ask people with some professional expertise in each topic to join that task force. If you are writing a report based on the study circle records, the action forum is an excellent time to release it.

After the action forum, it is critical for program organizers to stay in touch with the task forces. Help them get off the ground by identifying convenors and setting meeting dates. To keep task force efforts in the public eye, create a newsletter which reports on their progress, and encourage newspapers and television stations to cover their work. Provide ways for newcomers to join task forces as the program moves along. The study circle program in Lima, Ohio, went even further, winning a grant from the Ohio Bureau of Justice Services to fund a Violence Prevention Center. The Center was designed to provide staff time to support the eleven task forces which arose from the study circle program. Finally, it is important to celebrate the task force achievements and build on them. One way to do this is through periodic large-group meetings.”

– excerpted from *Focus on Study Circles*, Winter 1998

#### **D. Include more policymakers in the study circles**

The experience of other communities has shown that a study circle program has its greatest effect on policymaking if public officials themselves are among the participants in the groups. In that way, their authority and expertise is brought into the process, but public officials are treated like fellow human beings rather than experts who have the potential to solve problems by themselves. Their wisdom is included in the mix, but they are not put on the spot. Rather than being treated as the distant recipients of formalized public input, they are treated as powerful collaborators in addressing common problems. Public officials have the chance to hear the concerns of real citizens and realize that citizens are capable of addressing complex issues.

#### **Recommendation #2: Create circles which include both city-dwellers and suburbanites**

One of the most innovative aspects of the Community Circle Collaborative program is its focus on regional issues. Segregation in housing and education is an issue with a regional scope, requiring deliberation and action by people in multiple communities. However, the majority of the community circles were limited to people who lived or worked in a particular area. This made it much more difficult for suburbanites to understand the concerns of city-dwellers, and vice versa.

During the second round, institutions could be paired so that each study circle included people from more than one community. For example, a church in Minneapolis with 10 people signed up to participate could be paired with a suburban Kiwanis Club bringing 10 people. The institutions could meet at either site (or an alternate site), and split their pool of 20 people into two community circles.

Another strategy which could be used along with or instead of the pairing approach would be to locate all the community circles at "sectional" sites. The Twin Cities region could be divided into sections like the spokes of a wheel, with each section including some urban areas as well as second- and third-ring suburbs. All the participants for that section could meet at a large facility with many rooms, such as a school, college campus, library, or community center. On the first evening, participants could be assigned to diverse community circles on the spot. Since multiple circles would be meeting on the same evening in the same building, participants could be brought together for a brief reporting session (20 minutes) at the end of each session. This strategy was used successfully in a study circle program in Oklahoma, where it also ensured greater media coverage since reporters could attend the reporting sessions and get a quick snapshot of the deliberations.

Community circles with a mix of urbanites and suburbanites would probably make the experience more unique, illuminating, and exciting for participants. In addition, action groups or task forces which emerged from the action forum or the community circles themselves would be more likely to combine city-dwellers and suburbanites. That kind of cooperation, in itself, would make a statement to the rest of the region.

#### **Recommendation #3: Improving racial, ethnic, and gender diversity**

##### **A. Race and ethnicity**

The full group of participants (350+) was fairly representative of the Twin Cities community as a whole in terms of race/ethnicity. However, individual groups did not reflect this diversity. As a result, some participants perceived that the process was not representative. A number of comments were made regarding how "the right people aren't here."

The suggestions contained in Recommendation #2, above, would help address this problem. However, the

Community Circles Collaborative might also expand further, recruiting organizations representing constituencies which weren't adequately represented in the first round. These could include service clubs and congregations that are known to appeal to members of particular groups. Pairing congregations and other sponsoring organizations to promote racial and ethnic intermingling would be a good measure, even if the urban-suburban strategy mentioned above is not utilized. A third approach would involve deliberately assigning volunteers of one ethnicity to join a discussion group dominated by another. Because it is safe to presume that the vast majority of participants are persons of good will and intent, finding volunteers willing to cross barriers should not be difficult.

## **B. Gender**

The group of participants as a whole was not well-balanced by gender. Men made up only about one-fourth of the participants. The all-female memberships of a couple of study circles even remarked on the absence of male counterparts and asked what could be done to "get the men here."

Although gender imbalance is not uncommon for a volunteer group of this type, gender imbalance needs to be addressed in the next round of circles. One possible approach would be to specifically invite participation by male-dominated clubs or the men's groups from various faith communities.

### **Recommendation #4: Give more training and support to facilitators**

The reports from the circles, and the surveys completed by the facilitators themselves, suggest that the quality of facilitation was uneven. This is one of the potential pitfalls of using volunteers, but it need not be a fatal one.

EHEP could turn to professional facilitators to conduct the next round of meetings, but this is not necessary nor even particularly wise. What is needed is better training and support for volunteer facilitators. For example, at least one facilitator complained that the group he or she led frequently strayed from the topic – without any apparent understanding that it is the job of the facilitator to keep the group focused and moving, so it can produce the results it wants within the allotted time.

The facilitator training process and packet reflect this failure to teach the basics. Training emphasized the content of the sessions and cultural considerations – both critical topics, to be sure, but not to the exclusion of learning how to lead a productive meeting, keep the group focused, mediate conflict, and handle difficult people ("difficult" here referring to any number of problems, including glibness, silence, stonewalling, attempts to dominate, etc.).

*Getting people involved in addressing public issues is not a "nice" thing. . . .*

*What you want people to say is not that it is a nice thing to do  
but that it's an absolutely necessary thing to do.*

*– Martha McCoy, Study Circles Resource Center*

Given that some of the facilitators are relatively inexperienced, using co-facilitators might be invaluable. Experienced facilitators could be paired with facilitators who are new to the process. Pairing facilitators of different ethnicities (or a young person and an adult) would also make a statement to the participants about the inclusivity of the project.

Having a monitor present to step in and redirect the group's energy might also be helpful. A monitor can keep an eye on several groups at a time and keep tabs on the clock as well. The monitor's presence allows each facilitator to engage fully in the group's discussion and ensure that both substance and direction

remain relevant. Moreover, should any facilitator encounter difficulty with a particular group – belligerence, refusal to focus, etc. – someone else is present to mediate and help the group get moving in positive ways again. The presence of a monitor can aid neophyte and experienced facilitators alike.

In CCC's case, the difficulties in using monitors are logistical: If each group is meeting at its own place and time, it is simply infeasible for a single monitor to be present. Neither would this be an efficient use of anyone's time. Moreover, the number of monitors available will necessarily be limited by the need for each one to be highly experienced in facilitation and/or team leadership. These difficulties could be overcome through a different approach to scheduling discussions.

#### **Recommendation #5: Schedule all meeting times in advance**

Ironically, it is possible that individual groups were given *too much* latitude in scheduling their own meetings – which means that each person's dentist appointment, TV viewing habits, softball league, family demands, vacation and other prior commitments interfered with circle meetings. Multiply this effect by ten or fifteen circle members, and it becomes clear why scheduling was a problem.

Rather than leaving the scheduling decision wide open, it may be more effective to set up group meeting times in advance. For example, meetings in each round of discussions could be slated to take place at one of four or five predetermined times at one of four or five predetermined locations. Discussants would be asked to select one of those times and places to participate, either for the entire series or on a meeting-by-meeting basis. Advance sign-ups would probably be necessary in order to make sure that all time slots have enough participants; otherwise, intended participants would have to be notified of a change in plans.

Although this approach might entail some additional work on the part of the organizers, it might also eliminate some work by eliminating confusion about who is meeting where, and when. Moreover, sponsoring organizations would remain heavily involved in coordinating meetings and keeping track of participants.

Adopting an approach similar to this one could produce several benefits:

- It would impose some discipline on the groups and indicate that the study circles are not a social event that takes place only when everyone is free, but a formalized process with demands of its own.
- It would allow coordinators to balance the sizes of the circles, eliminating problems caused by poor attendance in some groups while others overflow.
- It would allow individuals who might miss one set time to "make up" a session at a different time, thus facilitating participation in the entire series of discussions.
- It would allow individuals to sample different locations, if desired, thus exposing them to a much wider range of viewpoints and ideas.
- It would enable the circle coordinators at any given location to balance racial and gender representation more effectively, either by pairing sponsoring organizations or by randomly assigning incoming individuals to different discussion groups.
- It would allow for the efficient use of monitors in support of facilitators.
- It would put everyone on essentially the same timetable, with a clear beginning and a clear end.

One potential drawback to this approach is that some groups would lose the continuity and, hence, the familiarity that foster trust and openness. However, the process itself can help to encourage such openness. Moreover, most discussion groups will probably remain essentially intact throughout the entire series due to individual choices.

# **Community Circle Collaborative**

## **Lead Partner**

Education and Housing Equity Project

## **Organizing Partners**

Citizens League  
City of Minneapolis, Office of the Mayor  
Institute on Race and Poverty, University of Minnesota  
INTER-RACE, Augsburg College  
Macalester College Department of Urban Studies  
Metropolitan Interfaith Council on Affordable Housing  
Minneapolis Initiative Against Racism  
Minneapolis Public Schools  
Minneapolis Neighborhood Revitalization Program  
Minnesota Minority Education Partnership  
Minnesota Public Radio Civic Journalism Project  
Minnesota Churches Anti-Racism Initiative of the  
Greater Minneapolis, Minnesota, and Saint Paul Area Councils of Churches  
Minnesota Fair Housing Center  
Minnesota Meeting  
People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, North Chapter  
Southside Neighborhood Housing Services  
Twin Cities Free-Net  
Urban Coalition  
West Metro Education Project

## **Funding Partners**

Bremer Foundation  
Bush Foundation  
Center for Urban and Regional Affairs  
Minneapolis Foundation  
Saint Paul Foundation

## **National Partners**

Study Circles Resource Center  
Kettering Foundation/National Issues Forum

In addition to the organizing and funding partners, many partner organizations and individuals are joining the collaborative as resource partners, facilitators, and as sponsors of the community circles being convened throughout the metropolitan area.