Nile Harper. *Urban Churches* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999),

Harper, Nile. *Urban Church*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999.

Nile Harper was educated at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana; at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago; and the Union Theological Seminary in New York City. He earned the master's degree in sociology at the New School of Social Research in New York and the doctorate in education a Columbia University, New York City. Harper is ordained Presbyterian minister and served churches in New Jersey, Iowa, and Michigan. He served as the director of Urban Church Research in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and as an adjunct faculty member at Ecumenical Theological Seminary in Detroit. He authored *Urban Churches, Will the Church Lose the City?, Social Conflict and Adult Christian Education, Social Power and the Limitations of Church Education, the Dubuque Freeway: A Case Study in Urban Power.*

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Add this part to Prescription

I have been very critical of churches that have nothing to do with their neighbors. They come from somewhere and worship and disappear toward everywhere. The church knows no single neighbor in the church environment and the neighbor wouldn't know any single soul in the church. Therefore, I have been suggesting that churches must walk into the community as I took a church into the city streets where homeless people hang out and live. Then the church will become part of the community and community will be in the church before they know it. The two will be one. This is what exactly McNeal suggested also for the church to go to the community. This is what exactly happening reported by Harper calling the urban church is "the vital sign of the city."

Vital signs are indicators of life in the body. Urban churches are a significant part of the body of Christ. In the past decades, there has been a redevelopment of strength and energy in a significant number of city-center congregations. While this is not true for majority of urban churches, it is true for a substantial, creative minority. Urban churches are being revitalized and reoriented to new ministries. Neighborhoods are being rebuilt;

new housing is being constructed; businesses are being created; and new schools and community-based health care centers are being established. Communities are coming to new life and taking charge of their future.[1]

> Churches located in the heart of many urban centers are one of the most important sources for this renewal of American inner cities. From within the churches, and especially within African-American churches, there has emerged a passionate vision and push for redevelopment of city neighborhoods that is deeply rooted in religious faith and practical wisdom. In many older city-center neighborhoods, the churches are the only local institutions remaining that have credibility and connection to the people living there. Many urban congregations have a history and tradition of compassionate social service ministries among the poor, the oppressed, and the homeless. The decline, decay, and the deterioration of urban neighborhoods, especially in industrial cities, together with changing economic, political, and cultural circumstances, have contributed to the necessity for this new development. The people most impacted by these changes are organizing to respond creatively.[2]

The consequence is that due to such an urban development in the city centers, now ninety-percent of the church members live within walking distance of the church. About eighty percent are African American and so is the leadership in the congregation. The people of the neighborhood are now the people of the church. And the church is everywhere present in the neighborhood.[3]

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[1] Nile Harper, *Urban Churches* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 1.

[2] Harper, *Urban Churches*, 1-2.
Harper indicated the following vital signs in urban churches: Increasing vigorous and creative worship life taking place in a growing umber of city congregations: In city centers where congregations are vital and growing, church members and pastors are engaging in community-building in the neighborhoods. Urban churches are places where people of all ages – children, youth, young adults, older adults – can experience acceptable, affirmation, and encouragement, rooted in the unconditional love of God: With this focus on community-building, many churches in city centers are taking leadership in creative ministries of redevelopment: As churches become more and more involved with social justice work, they have also become more politically aware and involved: Urban churches are working in partnership with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in much greater numbers with a new spirit of mutual respect and collaboration: Increased community and justice work has led urban congregations to seek out a variety of resources: Many urban church-sponsored community development corporations (CDCs) have been significantly supported in their work to create affordable housing and advance economic development by the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC): At the forefront of all this activity is a rising, new generation of urban church pastors who are skilled in organizing, creating partnership, securing financial resources, and generating religious community: A growing number of mainline urban churches are being revitalized by new members from diverse racial or ethnic groups: Harper, *Urban Churches*, 3-10.
[3] Harper, *Urban Churches*, 146.

From a Christian theological perspective, charity is rooted in sacrificial love as seen in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In its ultimate meaning, charity is the unconditional love that God freely gives to humankind, as expressed in Jesus Christ. Over the centuries the church has taught that charity is the greatest Christian virtue. However, there are significant limits to what charity can do. Ordinarily, charity deals with personal needs of an immediate nature, and does not deal with the root causes of injustice and human suffering. Sometimes charity can become a barrier to doing the more difficult work of justice. In some churches, there is pride in giving financial support to charitable organizations that serve poor people. Often this is done with little or no thought about its unintended consequences. It many be done without any intention of becoming involved with the people for whom the aid is intended. Sometimes charity is given as a means of intentionally avoiding involvement with people who are different from one's own group of people [4]

I call this type of church "give a check model."

Therefore, Harper urges that urban congregations must go beyond acts of charity. They must go beyond the need to feel good about giving. What is most valuable is active partnership between oppressed people seeking to change the conditions of injustice, and other people who are willing to join in a common effort so that equity can be established.[5]

While we need to do charity through specialized organizations, often there is a strong tendency toward establishing a permanent underclass of alienated, marginalized, apathetic people. It must be acknowledged that social service helps millions of people cope with immediate emergencies, and provides helpful short-term assistance to people struggling with urgent problems. In a complex modern society a social safety net is a real necessity. Its major limitations are that it focuses on aiding people to adjust, adapt, and cope with the existing conditions. It does not challenge root causes of human misery and social injustice. It tends to create dependency and dehumanization and encourages the mentality of victimization. It becomes a central components in the welfare culture. It does not adequately emphasize a sense of responsibility for changing basic conditions.[6]

Systemic Justice: Add this part to public policy definition

Because we see there is injustice.

Changing policies, structures, and behaviors that are at the root of injustice is the focus of systemic justice. Efforts to change the large-scale systems that have great influence on the lives of persons and groups involve the conscious use of political and economic power. The emphasis is on distributive equity, and empowering groups of people to take charge of their own lives. At this level, consciousness shifts from being a victims to becoming a participants in shaping society in a more humane fashion. In a religious

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[4] Harper, *Urban Church*, 298.
[5] Harper, *Urban Church*, 298.
[6] Harper, *Urban Church*, 300.

frame of reference, love operating as justice at the societal level helps to unveil the pretensions and social fictions by which injustice is maintained. Justice is understood to move beyond the purely personal realm into the institutional realm where people power can be mobilized over against entrenched institutional power. Therefore, social justice focuses on basic cause of oppression, inequity, and disenfranchisement. It seeks to change public policy and public priorities. It works to empower people to take initiatives in ways that are positive and constructive. [7] Nile Harper. *Urban Churches* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999),

Therefore, systemic justice by its nature involve political action, mobilizing voting power, creating common interest alliances, and building cooperative collations. [8]

[7] Harper, Urban Church, 300.

[8] Harper, *Urban Church*, 301.