

Housing, education lead to opportunities

The focus of the Archdiocesan Beyond the Boundaries Program is affordable housing (Inclusionary Zoning) in the Baltimore region for all of its citizens. Housing is more than just shelter. Mixed income schools that result from this provide for a better education and more employment opportunities through social networking. Affordable housing works to offset the spiraling decline of neighborhoods into areas of concentrated poverty that are associated with drug addiction, violence and murder. Children born into this environment have little chance to succeed as they are caught in these war zones. Imagine for a moment, being born unlucky and having to grow up in an area of concentrated poverty...imagine the innocent 3-year-olds that come out in their 20s with a 70 percent incarceration rate.

Beyond the Boundaries concerns itself with Fairness in Housing in the Baltimore region in an attempt to reach out to fellow human beings living in these areas of concentrated poverty. These areas did not always exist, nor were they the result of the young black males blamed for such. Surprisingly, they were the result of unintentional consequences of government actions. The blueprint for their building is best described in the book "Urban Injustice-How Ghettos happened" by David Hilfiker MD, a physician who has committed much of his life to causes of poverty in our Nation, especially Black urban poverty. In his book, he describes the giant migration of African-Americans from the rural south into the north as factory workers with the outbreak of World War I. When the war ended and depression set in, these unskilled workers were excluded from President FDR's New Deal Programs to alleviate poverty because Social Security and mandatory unemployment insurance excluded domestic and agricultural workers. Since two-thirds of the African-Americans were in this category, most blacks were not eligible for federal benefits. Then the Federal Housing Administration, where the FHA redlined almost all African-American communities, refused to guarantee mortgage loans because they were too risky. Thus began a series of unintentional actions by Government that resulted in further isolating the poor and the black population. Such areas became toxic and more toxic in time leading to a Culture of Despair.

Baltimore is a region and we need to address our problems by getting churchgoers to understand that housing policy is educational policy and a gateway to employment, opportunity and networks that link to a better way of life.

Raymond D. Bahr MD, is a member of the Beyond the Boundaries Steering Committee.