



# 2024 Community Read Guiding Document

## Background:

For over 25 years, the Sisters of Charity Foundation of South Carolina has been committed to our mission of reducing poverty in South Carolina. This year, our staff, Board, and Board committee members will be reading *Poverty, By America* by Matthew Desmond. As we read Dr. Desmond's book, we will engage in thoughtful conversations exploring why such levels of poverty exist in our country and how our organization can work collectively with the broader community in South Carolina to address these systemic issues.

## Join us!

We know that so many organizations, community members, and leaders are seeking to address issues that are tied to poverty like access to healthcare, affordable housing, quality childcare and education, and so many more. **We invite you to read along with us and have your own conversations with your teams and communities about collective action opportunities to address these issues.** Below is the session schedule and discussion questions that our team will use for our staff and board conversations, as well as a list of discussion questions from Matthew Desmond's team. Please feel free to use any of these documents with your team or customize them to work best for your own discussions!



# Sample Schedule and Questions

These conversations and topics can be challenging to discuss. We begin each session by reviewing and accepting a **Brave Space Agreement**. Feel free to use ours or create your own.

## Session 1

April

Prologue -  
Chapter 3

- Prologue Question
  - The prologue ends by saying "Ending poverty will require new policies and renewed political movements, to be sure. But it will also require that each of us, in our own way become poverty abolitionists, unwinding ourselves from our neighbors' deprivation and refusing to live as unwitting enemies of the poor." What word or words describe how you felt or your experience reading the prologue?
- Chapter One: The Kind Of Problem Poverty Is
  - Desmond provides a definition of poverty that is multifaceted and nuanced, stating that poverty is "a tight knot of social problems." How does Desmond's definition of poverty differ from dominant narratives about poverty? Was there any piece of Desmond's definition that surprised you or stood out to you?
- Chapter Two: Why Haven't We Made More Progress?
  - America has repeatedly shown its capability in solving hard problems, but poverty persists. What are some of the contributing factors to the persistence of poverty in the US that Desmond highlights?
- Chapter Three: How We Undercut Workers
  - What common narratives about the cause of poverty in the US does Desmond outline? How does Desmond challenge these narratives (ex: who benefits from these conditions)?

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## Session 2

June

Chapters  
4 - 6

- Chapter Four: How We Force The Poor to Pay More
  - What are some of the ways people experiencing poverty are targeted because of their situation. What role does racism play? (ex. Banking/ Lender institutions).
- Chapter Five: How We Rely On Welfare
  - Desmond broadens the term welfare to include all government assistance regardless of income level. Do you think adopting this terminology or another term that includes all forms of government assistance might impact how we approach reducing poverty? Do you think the scarcity mindset would be used if all government assistance was included?
- Chapter Six: How We Buy Opportunity
  - Desmond points to the privatization of public services as a way the well-to-do buy opportunity and the major motivation behind privatization was the desegregation of public spaces. What role does racism play in maintaining high levels of poverty in America? How does the fear of "the other" impact initiatives that might reduce poverty (ex. Loosening zoning regulation to allow more mixed income housing.)

# Sample Schedule and Questions

**Session 3**  
**September**  
*Chapters*  
*7 - 9*  
*&*  
*Epilogue*

- Chapter Seven: Invest In Ending Poverty
  - Desmond believes we all have a hand in producing poverty in America through voting yes on policies that lead to “private opulence” and “public squalor.” What are some of the policies or votes in our communities and our state that protect wealth at the cost of people experiencing poverty?
- Chapter Eight: Empower The Poor
  - How might we use our imagination to create a world where there is a living wage; healthcare; workers can easily organize; affordable housing is the norm? What can we do individually and as an organization to become poverty abolitionist?
- Chapter Nine: Tear Down The Walls
  - Desmond gives the following suggestions of what needs to be done to alleviate poverty: rebalance the safety net, empower people experiencing poverty by reining in exploitation, and invest in broad prosperity by turning away from segregation. Where do you see opportunities for us to do this in South Carolina, especially in terms of state public policy?
- Epilogue Question
  - Desmond talks about the importance of getting in relationships with the working class and people experiencing poverty. How have you done this or how might you do this?

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## Thank You

As we continue to work together to build a South Carolina where all individuals have the resources to thrive, we appreciate the opportunity to learn with our fellow advocates. We hope your conversations will be fruitful and lead to positive action!

*Have a question or want to share what you learned?*

*Contact SK Catalano, Community Engagement Manager, at [skcatalano@sistersofcharitysc.com](mailto:skcatalano@sistersofcharitysc.com).*

