

Imagination

In "Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed," Jared Diamond weaves lessons learned from history, archeology and humanity from past societies that have not survived. Diamond shares the factors leading to societal collapse, especially the results from environmental destruction, and how well-intentioned people make devastating choices about their survival and their children's future. He also points out some modern societies that show signs of severe environmental distress: Rwanda, Haiti, China and Australia.

Today globalization brings even more cause for concern. We are so interconnected and dependent on one another that the collapse of one society can have a devastating effect for all of us. We can't afford to have any country collapse or fail.

So what am I to do about this? I have no control over other countries and don't often feel confident about my ability to influence what is happening in my own country. So I begin with something more manageable — the community in which I live, work and pray.

Analogous to Diamond's take on the part of environmental destruction to societal collapse, I think about other ethical and moral choices leading to success or failure. In my world as a director of an organization providing services to people living in poverty, the following are factors that are indicators of how we are faring:

- In the state of Kentucky, 24 percent of our chil-

VIEWPOINT



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dren are living in poverty;

- 89 percent of the children in Covington Independent Schools receive free/reduced lunch;
- There are thousands of households without access to affordable housing in Northern Kentucky;
- There is an inadequate supply of jobs that provide for a living wage;
- Abuse of prescription and other drugs and alcohol is on the rise;
- Households make decisions as to whether to pay the rent, put food on the table or buy their medication;
- Abuse and violence are prevalent in our community;
- Greed and inattention led to the collapse of our financial institutions directly impacting the future stability of us all.
- As a nurse and someone who daily witnesses people who do not receive adequate or any healthcare, I see the healthcare system is more ill than its most sick patients.

I could go on.

For people living in poverty, household income does not cover basic needs of shelter and food let alone other living expenses. They live doubled up with family and friends and move frequently in order to survive. The result is that children miss a lot of school, change schools frequently, and ultimately miss out on the very thing that will give them a chance for a more stable life. The cycle is often repeated.

Optimism and hope do not require ignoring these indicators, but they do require that we know and understand our perceptions and how we respond to the problems. How our society succeeds depends on us. It requires that we are awake, seek knowledge, solve problems with the common good and future generations in mind, are persistent, are courageous, vote, are ethical, think critically, are compassionate, and embrace diversity.

God gave us two vital gifts, one within our cranium and the other within our chest cavity, which will determine in large part what kind of society we will be. What we don't do is as important as what we do. Our values should be reflected in choices that we make, how we fill our time, how we prioritize valuable resources and make decisions.

What if as a community we committed to do everything possible to ensure that every child stays in school and learns to the best of his or her ability. Yes, it means prioritizing resources but more than that it requires an investment of time. I have done this work long enough to know that no amount of money will fix our social problems. It takes people invested in other people to insure a thriving community.

The choice is ours. If we fail, it will be a failure of imagination and will.

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Vol. 79
MESSENGER
 No. 41

Official newspaper of the Diocese of Covington

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(UPS 403-650) Published by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Covington, Ky., 44 issues a year (weekly except from June 1 to mid-August, when published every other week, not published the week after Easter and two weeks at Christmas/New Year's). Subscription rate: \$19 per year; \$40 foreign. Periodical postage paid at Covington, KY 41012 and additional mailing office Cincinnati, Ohio 45203. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to MESSENGER, P.O. Box 15550, Covington, KY 41015-0550.

Advertising deadline: Wednesday noon, 9 days prior to publication date.
Editorial deadline: Friday noon, 7 days prior to date.
Subscriptions, address changes: Contact Circulation Dept. at above address.

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