“My sweetheart and my parents / I left in my old hometown / I’m out to do the best I can / As I go ramblin’ round.” — “Ramblin’ Round,” Woody Guthrie

The themes of re-invention and self-invention in American life have long interested me and inspired my film work, from Con Man (the story of an Ivy League impostor) to Full Battle Rattle (the Iraq war seen through the prism of role-play). The lure of the boomtown and its powerful place in the American imagination stem from its seductive promise of redemption and fortune for the brave and the desperate. It is this theme—played out in stark, raw terms in North Dakota and viewed through the prism of Pastor Jay Reinke’s church—that drew me to this story.

As a student of American history, I was fascinated by the idea that a boomtown existed in modern-day America. Stories about Williston, North Dakota, suggested an intoxicating and possibly combustible mixture of oil, men, money, opportunity and crime.

How did the reality of Williston square with our understanding of historical boomtowns like Deadwood, Dodge City and Gold Rush-era San Francisco? The history of those places is now inseparable from their mythology, and like most people, I’d only read about them in books or seen them depicted in Hollywood Westerns. I was curious to see the real Williston up close and measure it against those iconic locales, at least as they existed in the popular imagination.

The story of modern-day Williston and the mass migration of Americans in search of work also recalls the Dust-Bowl migration of the 1930s, a movement depicted in John Steinbeck’s classic novel The Grapes of Wrath and the folk ballads of Woody Guthrie. These echoes convinced me that this was a deeply, uniquely American story worth pursuing.

I also suspected that the flood of relentlessly positive stories about easy opportunity and high wages in Williston and the economic promise of energy and oil concealed a darker, ground-level truth.

My introduction to Pastor Jay came through a clergy column that he published in the Williston Herald, in which he urged townsmen to welcome outsiders. The sincerity of his sentiment struck a chord in me, and I called him. He spoke warmly and passionately, and he invited me to visit him at Concordia Lutheran Church.

When I arrived at the church shortly after our conversation, there were about 50 people sleeping there. I met tradesmen from Southern and Western states hard hit by the housing bust, African immigrants, kids from rural communities with no employment prospects, broken men, ex-cons, guys with Ph.D.’s and even a middle-aged Filipina nurse from my hometown, San Francisco, hoping to land a job as a flight attendant. Pastor Jay told me, “The world has arrived on my doorstep.” And he was right.

The church was a raw, emotional place. Desperation forces people to drop their usual defenses. Men cried as they showed me pictures of their children. They told me about their dreams of lucrative jobs on the oil rigs that checkered the prairie landscape. I decided to stay and film. I was determined to make an observational documentary. I had no idea how the story would turn out, but I found a path to follow and someone to lead me down it.

For the first six months of production, I slept in the church, among the men. This was largely out of necessity. All the hotels and man-camps were booked solid by oil companies. The sleeping conditions, while not ideal, yielded a greater understanding of what the community inside and outside the church was like and helped me forge a strong relationship with both Pastor Jay and the men I chose to follow.

There were times, during production, that I felt like an “overnighter.” Perhaps the forces that drew me to Williston—a search for opportunity, work and meaning in my life—were not far different from those that compelled the men I met. It was enormously difficult to find support for the film, which made the journey seem closer to folly or failure at times.

I’d like to think I emerged unscathed, but it was an intensely emotional and occasionally lonely experience. Two men I met and filmed—but only briefly—killed themselves in Williston. I had a gun pulled on me in nearby Wheelock and was attacked by a broomstick-wielding woman. I cried with Pastor Jay—several times. And I stumbled onto scenes of sublime beauty. I was lucky to be present for some extraordinary and intimate moments in the lives of these men. I’ve done my best to return the trust they offered me by making a compassionate, truthful and, I hope, lasting film.

Jesse Moss, Director/Producer, The Overnighers
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In Williston, N.D., busloads of unemployed hopefuls show up daily with dreams of honest work and a big paycheck under the lure of the oil boom. The reality that waits is starkly different: limited work prospects and a small town that lacks the infrastructure to house the overflow of migrants, even those who do find gainful employment.

Many of the men make their way to Concordia Lutheran Church. The church’s pastor, Jay Reinke, is driven to deliver the migrants some dignity. Night after night, he converts his church into a makeshift dorm and counseling center, allowing the “overnighters” (as he calls them) to stay for a night, a week or longer. They sleep on the floor, in the pews and in their cars in the church parking lot. Many who take shelter with Reinke are living on society’s fringes and have checkered pasts, and their presence starts affecting the dynamics of the small community.

The Overnighters documents the inevitable tensions and forces us to ask if there are limitations to charity, however well-intentioned. The film engages viewers in universal themes that emerge from the disputes in the congregation and in the community: belief in second chances bumps up against the limits of personal reinvention; commitment to the moral imperative to “love thy neighbor” and “welcome the stranger” is made difficult by perceived and real threats to community safety; the desire to help those in need threatens to overwhelm the modest resources of the church and the patience of neighbors.

When Reinke’s own congregants question the wisdom of their support for the overnighters and the city council threatens to shut down the controversial program, the dilemmas become personal for the pastor. The congregants’ doubts force him to question his own motives, and to reveal a secret that will profoundly change his life forever.
The Overnighters is an excellent tool for outreach and will be of special interest to people looking to explore the following topics:

- affordable housing
- American Dream
- Bakken shale oil fields
- biblical teachings
- boombtown economies
- Christian charity
- church
- community building
- corporate responsibility
- economic development
- economics
- ethics
- family
- fracking (hydrofracking)
- homelessness
- LGBTQ issues
- North Dakota
- oil booms
- oil drilling industry
- pastors
- sex offenders
- social fabric
- social responsibility
- sociology
- unemployment
- zoning

The Overnighters is well suited for use in a variety of settings and is especially recommended for use with:

- Your local PBS station
- Groups that have discussed previous PBS and POV films relating to community disputes, unemployment or economic development, including Flag Wars, Prison Town, USA, Street Fight, Waging a Living, and Where Soldiers Come From
- Groups focused on any of the issues listed in the Key Issues section
- High school students, youth groups and clubs
- Faith-based organizations and institutions
- Cultural, art and historical organizations, institutions and museums
- Civic, fraternal and community groups
- Academic departments and student groups at colleges, universities and high schools
- Community organizations with a mission to promote education and learning, such as local libraries.

This guide is an invitation to dialogue. It is based on a belief in the power of human connection, designed for people who want to use The Overnighters to engage family, friends, classmates, colleagues and communities. In contrast to initiatives that foster debates in which participants try to convince others that they are right, this document envisions conversations undertaken in a spirit of openness in which people try to understand one another and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening actively.

The discussion prompts are intentionally crafted to help a wide range of audiences think more deeply about the issues in the film. Rather than attempting to address them all, choose one or two that best meet your needs and interests. And be sure to leave time to consider taking action. Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even in instances when conversations have been difficult.

For more detailed event planning and facilitation tips, visit www.pov.org/engage.
The North Dakota Oil Boom: How and Why

With a population totaling approximately 725,000, North Dakota has the lowest rate of unemployment in the United States and a $1 billion budget surplus. Every year, 2,000 North Dakotans become millionaires. The population of the state has increased 4 percent in two years. Much of this can be attributed to the state’s oil boom. Williston, North Dakota is situated in the center of the Bakken—a geological formation stretching through parts of North Dakota, Montana and Canada that is the source of the eponymous Bakken oil boom. The Bakken oil boom is the biggest oil boom the area has ever seen and seven times larger than the previous boom in the 1980s, which lasted for approximately 10 years. It has catapulted North Dakota to the top of the list of oil-producing states in the United States—only Texas produces more oil per year.

In 2006, technological advances and a shifting geo-political climate created a perfect storm for investors in oil exploration and drilling. New shale gas reserves were discovered in the Bakken shale formation, and advances in hydraulic fracturing techniques (also known as “fracking” or “hydrofracking”) made these new reserves more readily accessible. Hydraulic fracturing breaks up underground rock with a pressurized liquid made of water, sand and chemicals. When the United States renewed its pursuit of energy independence from foreign energy sources, such as the Middle East and Venezuela, tax incentives and other legislation motivated oil companies to funnel money and labor into U.S.-based initiatives, like hydraulic fracturing in new reserves. All of these factors combined to create the North Dakota oil boom.

Sources:


Boom, Then Bust

Booms can happen in any industry. The California Gold Rush in the 1850s, for instance, is an example of an early industrial boom in the United States. A boom occurs when technological, legislative and environmental factors align to create an ideal moment for investment in an industry. Oil booms have regularly occurred in the United States since Pennsylvania’s oil rush in the 1860s. They are familiar territory for Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Colorado, Wyoming and Alaska—the major oil-producing states in the United States. The Midland-Odessa area in Texas has weathered more than four boom-bust cycles.

An oil boom is a time of inherently high risk and high reward. Economic diversity is a hallmark of a good economy, and relying on one industry for economic growth makes a community vulnerable to market shifts and swings. When multiple industries hold up a community’s economy, it becomes more resilient, and a down-shift in one industry will not signal the collapse of the economy overall.

An oil boom creates wealth in multiple ways. The entry-level worker—known as a “roustabout”—performs unskilled general maintenance and manual labor. A roustabout makes on average $34,680 per year, which is close to the median wage for all American workers. Oil rig workers, however tend to move up the pay scale quickly. As oil rig workers retire and operations continue to expand, companies scramble to fill positions. A number of oil companies offer training programs for their workers to certify them for higher level work. For those with less than one year’s experience, the average yearly earnings are $66,923—or a little less than double the entry-level salary.

The money earned by oil rig workers flows into the local economy. Unskilled positions such as jobs waiting tables offer wages of as much as $15 per hour in boomtowns, as employers hope to draw workers into the area to meet the demand of a rising population with money to spend. As workers move to town looking for work, prices of everything from a two-bedroom apartment to breakfast at the local diner begin to rise.
Landowners in oil boom communities reap profits in another way. In order to drill for oil, an oil company needs to secure the mineral rights to property owners’ land. North Dakotans who allow drilling on their property see monthly paychecks of $50,000 or more. However, because North Dakota differentiates between surface rights and mineral rights, landowners must still own their mineral rights in order to profit. Many landowners sold those rights during the smaller oil boom in the 1950s, not expecting the area to see the massive Bakken boom of today. Only those landowners who retained their mineral rights are able to profit directly from drilling on their land.

Many areas that experience booms have been through the boom-bust cycle before, and residents know that the bust can be devastating. A boom can go bust for many reasons. In the oil industry, worldwide geopolitical factors can affect business at home in the United States. Oil companies leave town, shutting down their rigs—and many of the people who moved in leave to find work elsewhere. This sudden exodus affects communities in obvious ways, such as a jump in unemployment and the collapse of inflated real estate prices, and in less obvious ways, like young workers deciding to forgo college for work in the oil field. Infrastructure—such as schools, housing, hotels and restaurants—is built up to accommodate the boom, and then those businesses and buildings are at risk for repossession when the population (and demand) plummets.

Unfortunately, the communities affected by the Bakken oil boom in North Dakota can use their own history as a barometer for what to expect when this boom finally goes bust. The North Dakota oil boom of the 1970s left behind debt and empty infrastructure—that is, until the next boom hit.

Sources:
Social Impact: Housing Insecurity and Health

Housing insecurity—defined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as “high housing costs in proportion to income, poor housing quality, unstable neighborhoods, overcrowding or homelessness”—is one of the most prominent social effects in areas experiencing oil booms.

Throughout the Bakken oil boom, towns in North Dakota have seen their populations grow by 50 percent. The population of Williston, for example, exploded from 15,000 people in 2010 to more than 30,000 in 2013. This kind of population surge leads to shortages in housing. Over two years, more than 1,000 men and women took advantage of the “overnighters” program at Concordia Lutheran Church. It was the only program of its kind in Williston serving so-called “economic refugees.”

Building investors don’t like oil booms because the booms will eventually bust. Investors aren’t likely to invest in infrastructure that won’t be needed in 10 years. This kind of insecure investment climate leads to housing shortages and strained public infrastructure, like overburdened roads and schools. New apartment buildings have hundreds of names on their waitlists.

Even local government can experience roadblocks to offering attainable housing (housing that is available—not necessarily affordable). With land values skyrocketing throughout the region, it can be difficult to find land on which to build new housing. And, as we see in the film, communities are not always keen on spending funds to house new residents.

Temporary housing in the form of trailers and RVs is a go-to solution for this problem. Another common solution is the creation of so-called “man camps”—semi-permanent housing where hundreds of men live together, dormitory-style. Often, the oil-rigging companies themselves sponsor these camps, but in temperate seasons man-camps can take shape as RV or tent living. In general, there are far more male oil workers than female oil workers. Increased boom-time demand in female-dominated careers, like hospitality and health care, draws women to boomtowns like Williston, but...
Women are also more likely to move with their families, rather than on their own. The high rate of single men looking for housing frequently leads to dormitory-style housing solutions.

Housing insecurity has multiple detrimental effects and is a public health issue. The Annual Review of Public Health qualifies the effects of housing insecurity as “hard” or “soft.” “Hard” effects include those that affect the physical health of the body—like being exposed to heat or cold or difficulty in accessing services or facilities. “Soft” effects include aspects of mental health, such as exclusion from a community and lack of social capital.

These “soft” and “hard” effects are exacerbated further by other markers of “outsider” status in a community such as Williston. For many of the men who participate in the overnighters program, searching for a job in Williston is a new beginning—a chance to start over in a new community. For those who have criminal records, finding and keeping housing is difficult even outside of the oil patch. Laws govern the movements and housing of registered sex offenders, for example. In North Dakota, offenders moving to the state must first register and be listed on a public website. Although there are no state laws in North Dakota that restrict where a sex offender may live or work, it is not illegal for landlords to refuse to rent to offenders.

These strains on the health and safety of the population of a boomtown can become a focus of municipal, county and state lawmaking and appropriation, leaving governments to answer the question of whether or not to incorporate the new boom population into their communities.

**Sources:**
BACKGROUN INFORMATION

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The Overnighters

Jay Reinke at a city council meeting.
Photo courtesy of “The Overnighters”

The Overnighters


Selected People Featured in The Overnighters

Jay Reinke is the 57-year-old pastor and spiritual leader of Concordia Lutheran Church in Williston, N.D.; at the end of the film, he is forced to resign. He now sells oil drilling equipment.

Andrea Reinke is Jay Reinke’s wife.

Alan Mezo is an overnighter from Spokane, Wash. who becomes the pastor’s assistant and oversees the overnighter program until it is revealed that he has an old conviction for a sex offense. He feels betrayed and angry when Reinke asks him to move out of the church.

Keegan Edwards is an overnighter from Antigo, Wis. who finds a job, gets a promotion and looks for a place to park a trailer so he can bring his girlfriend and baby to stay with him; they come for a visit, but don’t stay; he is forced to return to Wisconsin after he is injured in a car accident.
Selected People Featured in The Overnighters

Michael Batten is an overnighter and electrician from Tifton, Ga. who comes to Williston in the hope of earning money for his struggling family. He finds a job, but ultimately leaves because his absence threatens his family ties.

Paul Engel is an overnighter from New York City who becomes disillusioned with Williston and with Reinke when he is asked to leave the Reinke home so that the pastor can offer space to Keith Graves.

Keith Graves is an overnighter from Los Angeles who stays in the pastor’s home; his presence creates controversy because he is a registered sex offender.
Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen or pose a general question (examples below) and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion:

- If a friend asked you what this film was about, what would you say?
- Describe a moment or scene in the film that you found particularly disturbing or moving. What was it about that scene that was especially compelling for you?
- If you could ask anyone in the film a single question, whom would you ask and what would you ask them?
- What did you learn from this film? What insights did it provide?
DISCUSSION PROMPTS

Job Seekers
What did you learn from the film about the motives of the overnighters? In your view, what do their motives suggest about their character?

In your view, do the experiences of the overnighters provide evidence to support or disprove the notion that the “American dream” can become reality for anyone who tries hard enough?

Several of the men leave families back home. What did you observe about the impact of this dislocation and separation?

Pastor Jay Reinke observes, “There are guys that come, and I hate to use the word ‘failed,’ but they’ve not succeeded as they’d hoped. And coming to Williston represents an opportunity to try something again on a new playing field, with new opportunities.” How would you reconcile this with the experience of Alan Mezo, who is asked to leave his work at the church when past misdeeds are uncovered? Mezo says, “It doesn’t matter what good a person does. Even if they’re a hero today, five years down the road, that’s buried somewhere. That’s not on their record. And all it is on their record, that stays with them throughout their life, is the negative stuff. And it’s sad, because that’s what they’re judged by.”

Providing Comfort and Aid to the Needy
What do you notice about what Jay Reinke does and says that makes the overnighters feel valued? How do his demeanor and approach compare with the demeanor and approach of those who welcome homeless or marginalized people in your community?

The pastor explains the rules to a new overnighter this way: “First, we’re a church. If you’re not going to church someplace else, I’d like you to come to church. I think it’s only polite, OK? I don’t know what your church background is. We might have a chance to do that. But we do background checks here, okay? No weapons, no fighting, no profanity.”
What’s your reaction to these rules? Do they seem fair? Adequate?

Many political conservatives have argued that private charities, not the government, can and should provide essential help to people in need. What did you learn from the film that would be relevant to this argument?

Pastor Reinke feels a duty to “love thy neighbor,” but acknowledges that, “Not only are these men my neighbor, [but] the people who don’t want them here are also my neighbor.” When the needs of “neighbors” conflict, what processes or structures exist to help find solutions?

Welcoming the Stranger

The pastor acknowledges, “Everybody’s afraid of the newcomer. Very specifically, the overnighters are not welcome in this part of our community.” What are the sources of the community members’ fears? What role does prejudice play in those fears? In your view, which fears are reasonable?

Would you welcome overnighters into your neighborhood? Why or why not?

Pastor Reinke describes the dilemma faced by his church: Christians are compelled “to welcome the sinner,” while the reality is, “from a neighbor’s perspective, they could perceive us as harboring somebody who could hurt their child.” How would you reconcile this conflict?

In arguing against the town proposal to ban RVs, the pastor says, “I believe that Williston needs to take a step that says, ‘The people arriving on our doorstep are gifts to us.’ And though there is a burden in receiving them as a gift, to welcome them.” What are the “gifts” that the pastor references?

The news reports that just outside of Williston, 43-year-old high school math teacher Sherry Arnold went for a jog and never returned. She was found murdered. How did this news story influence policy? What role does/can media play in resolving community tensions related to the overnighters?

Pastor Reinke says, “I have to respect these men because I’ve asked myself, ‘What would I do if I got off a bus and I
had to find a job?” And these men do it.” What do you respect about the people you “meet” in the film? Do you think that the things you respect would be enough to mitigate concerns if you lived in Williston?

The pastor tries to reach out to the church’s neighbors with an invitation “to just sort of see the guys.” How might efforts to “humanize” the men in the eyes of the community change the dynamic? What would change if everyone saw the overnighters as the pastor sees them (i.e., as individuals with personal stories and families who are searching for a better life)? What wouldn’t likely change, even if everyone accepted the overnighters with compassion and respect?

**The Limits of Charity and Service**

In part, Reinke is reluctant to acknowledge the problems in his ministry because to do so would validate the prejudices directed at the overnighters. In your view, what are reasonable limits to welcoming strangers and providing comfort to the needy and shelter to the homeless? How would you set limits without reinforcing prejudice?

As the overnighter program grows, church membership declines, with some congregants saying they feel like they are being “invaded” and others expressing concern that dwindling membership numbers will make it impossible to sustain the church at all. One woman says that for a while, she “didn’t feel safe coming into the building.” Even the pastor recognizes that “the whole overnighter thing wasn’t really planned. The congregation never really did decide to do this, and that’s probably one of the chief criticisms that I have to bear.” In retrospect, what might the pastor and the congregation have done differently to ensure that congregants were on board with a ministry serving the overnighters?

Shelly Schultz makes her case to the pastor: “In church, a lot of times I feel really angry when I look around and see these guys. And I feel upset when I walk in and my church is messy and it smells bad, and there’s sand on the pews. And they seem disrespectful in church. Their cell phones are going off,
and sometimes they’re talking, and they’re walking in and out. And they don’t seem to understand what we’re doing, you know? And they don’t respect it. And I understand. That’s why I’m being very Christian, and all those kinds of things. But those are real feelings.” If you were in Reinke’s shoes, how would you respond to this congregant? How does he respond?

Schultz points out that, men who “can’t get a job here in the oil patch within the first 48 hours, 72 hours” are “probably not going to get a job there.” She argues that continuing to support them encourages them to stay and become a burden: “So we’re just going to contribute to that layer in the community that doesn’t need to be contributed to.” Is she right? Can you think of any examples in which well-intentioned aid actually makes a problem worse? Can you think of examples in which it makes a problem better?

Pastor Reinke regretfully says, “I’m not as involved with my wife or my children as I need to be somewhat regularly, because I’m preoccupied with what’s going on here. And I have to address that, for my own sake, as well as for their sake.” How would you and/or do you achieve balance?

Housing Policy

What are the obstacles that prevent Williston (and other Bakken boomtowns) from having housing options for the job seekers arriving in town?

According to Reinke, “Rents have tripled and quadrupled. People who’ve lived here all their lives are having to leave.” In many instances, housing is so expensive that even those who are fully employed have no choice but to live in trucks, campers and RVs. What should boomtowns like Williston do when market-based supply-and-demand approaches to housing fail?

The pastor explains to an overnighter, “It is legal to sleep in your car in Williston. But you can only sleep where people give you permission to sleep, and there’s not many places that do.” How does the law permitting people to sleep in their vehicles alleviate and also exacerbate Williston’s problems?
The town votes to ban RVs (people can’t stay in them for more than 28 days). Would you have supported this ban, even if it infringed on the rights of private property owners to rent out their yards or driveways and/or allow people to park RVs or campers on their property? Would you let people living in their vehicles park in your driveway or yard or in a church parking lot in your neighborhood? How about a grocery store parking lot or other commercial lot? Why or why not?

Reacting to the closure of the program on which he depends, one overnighter says, “You would think the city as a whole would be trying to help people that’s trying to help themselves... Everyone deserves a chance. This is America. That’s what this country was founded on, you know? Helping your neighbor, you know? Just being good people. And Williston’s not sending that message when they’re basically saying, you know, we’re homeless. And I’m not homeless. I’m just struggling. I have a home in Kentucky. I just want a better life.” Do you think his criticism of the town is fair? What policies could Williston adopt that would build community, preserve order and address the needs of overnighters as well as longtime community members?

**Corporate Responsibility**

As we see in the film, even those who find jobs have a hard time affording permanent housing. In your view, do companies have a responsibility to ensure that housing is available before they start recruiting workers?

In addition to any obligations that they might have to the people they hire, are the corporations that drill responsible in any way for those who show up looking for work but who don’t find jobs?

Do the oil companies and related businesses that make money from fracking the Bakken shale have any responsibility (beyond paying taxes on their profits) to the towns that have been disrupted by the influx of job seekers and employees? How about the individuals who are getting wealthy from the fracking boom? If you had to create a contract outlining those responsibilities, what would it say?
Several of the overnighters list the church as their home address because, according to one, companies won’t “hire you if you appear to be out of state. Got to have a Williston address.” How does this policy make things worse for the overnighters and for the people of Williston? What policies could drilling companies adopt that would help Williston residents cope with the changes to their town?

We see overnighter Keegan Edwards washing his hands with toxic solvent. Shelly Schultz observes, “These people come, and they rape, pillage and burn, and then they leave. It’s heartbreaking to me to see my plains, my prairies destroyed. The wildlife destroyed. Our water destroyed. This is not my home anymore, you know? And it’s very difficult.” How would you balance the need to protect environmental resources with the need for jobs and energy provided by fracking the Bakken shale? What, if any, regulations would you recommend?

**Ethical Dilemmas**

The church does a background check on each of the overnighters. In your view, does the community have a right to know what those checks uncover?

After a conflict with the pastor, Paul Engel is angry and alienated. He threatens to reveal information to the press that will harm the pastor and the overnighters program. Is it ethical for him to share what he knows? Is it ethical for others to ask him to keep secrets? Who will likely be helped and who will be hurt if he goes to the press?

*Williston Herald* editor David Rupkalvis, ignores the pastor’s pleas not to publish names and addresses of all sex offenders. Rupkalvis explains, “We decided that the public’s right to know outweighed the risk that people [like Keith Graves] that aren’t dangerous might get harmed.” Do you agree with the editor’s judgment?
Reinke pleads with Keith Graves to go public about the details of his criminal conviction, but Graves refuses. Do you think it was fair of the pastor to ask? Was it fair of Graves to refuse?

In response to a notice ordering the church to stop the overnighters program, Reinke says, “I don’t understand how a community can just simply turn its back on people who have no place to sleep. I would just wonder, are we even a community?” His daughter adds, “Kicking people out of the church isn’t going to change the fact that there’s still an oil boom going on. It’s not going to stop the people from coming. You know, people are under the assumption that, well, if everything were to just stop tomorrow, life would go back to the way it was. And that’s not true.” What was your reaction to the town’s decision? Do you think that the pastor’s indictment of the community is justified?

Personal Journeys

Pastor Reinke tells a man, who is struggling with substance abuse, “You and I are a whole lot more alike than we are different…I’m broken. We’re broken. We’re just broken. We’re in this together…It’s a very broken world. Everybody’s broken.” What do you think he means? What role do you think addiction and substance abuse play in the conflicts involving the overnighters?

Pastor Reinke opens the film saying, “It’s easy to become a facade, maybe especially when you’re a pastor. But I know for me, the public persona, you can believe that; and the private person, becomes something else. And the result is always pain.” How profound is the public/private split in your own life? Is one side more authentic than the other? Does social media play a role in the public/private split? How do you integrate the public and private sides of yourself?

The pastor questions his own motives: “Maybe this is just more self-serving than what I realize. Maybe it’s as simple as I don’t say ‘no’ very well. And so it’s easier to say ‘yes’ and live with the consequences.” In what ways are the pastor’s actions self-serving and in what ways are they selfless? Under what circumstances is it okay to be self-serving, and when does a selfish motivation become a problem?

At the end of the film, Reinke makes a confession: “I was the one who always preached serving others to the overnighters. Serve the community. Serve the neighbors. And, in some of the most fundamental ways, in relationship to my family. I didn’t serve. And I neglected the community I was given and my family. And I have, I have hurt them terribly. The private me distances itself from the public me. And I can believe the public me because sometimes it looks very good. But the private me has become something else. This is a hard thing to say, but in my life I have struggled with same-sex attraction, and I’ve acted on that. It’s true. I’m the one who is broken.” How did this revelation influence your thinking about the rest of his work?

A news article in the Williston Herald.
Photo courtesy of “The Overnighters”

Additional media literacy questions are available at: www.pbs.org/pov/educators/media-literacy.php
Taking Action

• In your own religious congregation, dedicate time to studying what your faith teaches about giving comfort to the homeless or the stranger. Use those teachings to formulate a plan of action to tackle the challenges of homelessness in your community.

• Investigate conflicts over acceptable property use in your city or town and the role that zoning policies play in those conflicts. Advocate for changes to the policies that you think would help resolve the conflicts or prevent future disputes.

• Identify organizations in your community that are working on affordable housing issues and ask how you can help.

• Host a panel discussion on boomtowns and corporate responsibility. Invite speakers with expertise in history, economics and social justice to address this question: How are corporations profiting from the Bakken shale oil field benefit the region and are there any ways that the companies should be held accountable for negative impact of their business operations?
AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Most work on affordable housing is done at the state and local level. To find advocacy organizations, search your state and “affordable housing” or check the websites of the film’s partners if they are in your area:

- Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency (California Bay Area): www.self-sufficiency.org
- Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (Austin, Texas): www.austinecho.org

DANIEL SILLMAN

http://danielsilliman.blogspot.com/2013/01/could-charity-replace-welfare.html – This religion professor’s blog offers a well-documented discussion of whether or not private charity can replace government aid programs.

THE DENVER POST: “NORTH DAKOTA HOME PRICES SOAR WITH OIL BOOM”

www.denverpost.com/education/ci_25192767/zzz – This Associated Press story by James MacPherson describes Williston as one of the most expensive places in the nation to buy or rent a home.

BAKKEN SHALE

BAKKEN SHALE

www.bakkenshale.com – This oil industry run site includes job and housing listings, news about fracking and health reports.

ENERGY FROM SHALE: “FRACKING: GOOD NEWS FOR NORTH DAKOTA”

www.energyfromshale.org/americas-communities/north-dakota – This website provides an overview of fracking in North Dakota from the perspective of the oil industry.

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC: “BAKKEN SHALE OIL”

http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2013/03/bakken-shale-oil/dobbo-text – This 2013 article provides an overview of fracking in the Bakken shale oil fields and how it has changed the region.

WIRED: “ADVENTURES IN MAPMAKING: MAPPING A FRACKING BOOM IN NORTH DAKOTA”

www.wired.com/2015/01/advances-mapmaking-mapping-fracking-boom-north-dakota/ – This 2015 article by Mason Inman includes links to maps from government agencies, media, industry sources and fracking opponents, as well as Inman’s own map.
HOW TO BUY THE FILM

To order The Overnighters for home use, visit http://drafthousefilms.com/film/the-overnighters

Produced by American Documentary, Inc., POV is public television’s premier showcase for nonfiction films. The series airs Mondays at 10 p.m. on PBS from June to September, with primetime specials during the year. Since 1988, POV has been the home for the world’s boldest contemporary filmmakers, celebrating intriguing personal stories that spark conversation and inspire action. Always an innovator, POV discovers fresh new voices and creates interactive experiences that shine a light on social issues and elevate the art of storytelling. With our documentary broadcasts, original online programming and dynamic community engagement campaigns, we are committed to supporting films that capture the imagination and present diverse perspectives.

POV films have won 32 Emmy® Awards, 18 George Foster Peabody Awards, 12 Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Awards, three Academy Awards®, the first-ever George Polk Documentary Film Award and the Prix Italia. The POV series has been honored with a Special News & Documentary Emmy Award for Excellence in Television Documentary Filmmaking, two IDA Awards for Best Continuing Series and the National Association of Latino Independent Producers (NALIP) Award for Corporate Commitment to Diversity. More information is available at www.pbs.org/pov.

POV Digital www.pbs.org/pov

Since 1994, POV Digital has driven new storytelling initiatives and interactive production for POV. The department created PBS’s first program website and its first web-based documentary (POV’s Borders) and has won major awards, including a Webby Award (and six nominations) and an Online News Association Award. POV Digital continues to explore the future of independent nonfiction media through its digital productions and the POV Hackathon lab, where media makers and technologists collaborate to reinvent storytelling forms. @povdocs on Twitter.

POV Community Engagement and Education

POV’s Community Engagement and Education team works with educators, community organizations and PBS stations to present more than 650 free screenings every year. In addition, we distribute free discussion guides and standards-aligned lesson plans for each of our films. With our community partners, we inspire dialogue around the most important social issues of our time.

American Documentary, Inc. www.amdoc.org

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, online and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation.

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Front cover: Keegan Edwards, an Overnighter from Antigo, Wisconsin.
Photo courtesy of “The Overnighters”