

POVERTY: AN ADJUSTMENT IN THOUGHT

By Rick Bunch, *Earth Stewardship Team*

Poverty is where you find it. One dictionary defines poverty as “the condition or quality of being poor; deficiency; inadequacy; scarcity.”

When one pictures poverty, scenes of huddled masses living in squalor and lacking adequate housing, food, water, and sanitation flash before us. Those images are powerful. However, what if one were to shift the paradigm slightly? Suppose you expanded the terms deficiency and inadequacy to include poverty of relationship, poverty of imagination, poverty of ideas, and lack of action?

Given those concepts, what could happen if we generated abundance in ideas and actions to address those huddled masses through relationships, commitment, and relief? Would not this expand stewardship to include thought and insight?

The recent global pandemic has required us to recognize that no one is immune from a rampant virus, regardless of wealth, position, or class. At the same time, much of the world’s population is at increased risk because of ethnicity, culture, and status. COVID-19 research suggests the poor and people of color are far more susceptible than those of means. This relates to populations across the globe.

It is not just an issue for health practitioners, but a key factor in peace and justice. We cannot ignore the violence caused by destruction, degradation, and lack of access to Earth’s resources, matters that leave millions in poverty and hunger. This quiet, insidious violence denies millions access to clean air and water, resulting in disease and death.

Furthermore, the World Bank has determined that climate change contributes to the malaise with the potential to drive hundreds of millions into poverty. The extension of that projection is hunger.

The UN World Food Programme says the poor are hungry, and their hunger traps them in poverty. It cites hunger as the top cause of death in the world each year, killing more than HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis combined. An estimated 800 million people worldwide do not have enough to eat. Hunger is a silent, lingering, and painful death. But people are just as maimed and lifeless as if dying from military conflict, violent human action, or even a virus. Solutions?

In 2011, the World Church adopted a statement of five Mission Initiatives that included, Abolish Poverty, End Suffering. That initiative includes helping those who hurt, feeding the hungry, supporting compassionate ministries, and responding in times

of crisis. Another initiative is Pursue Peace on Earth.

In response, the World Church Earth Stewardship Team and the Peace and Justice Team are mingling their missions to respond to those initiatives as a matter of ministry and justice.

The task seems daunting, and it’s tempting to use the word impossible. In the face of such poverty of thought, our church leadership has responded to the prophetic utterance that recognizes the plight of the poor and challenges us to act in the name of that Sacred Voice.

These are portentous times. The lives of many are being sacrificed unnecessarily to the gods of war, greed, and avarice. The land is being desecrated by the thoughtless waste of vital resources. You must obey my commandments and be in the forefront of those who would mediate this needless destruction while there is yet day.

—Doctrine and Covenants 150:7

God, the Eternal Creator, weeps for the poor, displaced, mistreated, and diseased of the world because of their unnecessary suffering. Such conditions are not God’s will. Open your ears to hear the pleading of mothers and fathers in all nations who desperately seek a future of hope for their children. Do not turn away from them. For in their welfare resides your welfare.

—Doctrine and Covenants 163:4a

This paragraph is followed by a statement of the importance of Earth stewardship.

That voice, ringing in our ears, is calling us to join and even accept leadership in organizations and movements responding and ministering to the poor. HealthEd Connect, Outreach International, UNICEF, crop walks, and food banks are but a few. A further action suggests supporting candidates at all levels who work for honesty in government, acknowledge the plight of the poor, offer solutions to poverty, and establish laws that protect those without access to justice.

This brings us back to our definitions of poverty. Our stewardship demands that we work together to abolish poverty in every sense of the word; to generate ideas, solutions, and relationships that build community. “I have called you by your name...” (Community of Christ Sings 636).





Enduring Principle*

BLESSINGS OF COMMUNITY

- The gospel of Jesus Christ is expressed best in community life where people become vulnerable to God's grace and each other.
- True community includes compassion for and solidarity with the poor, marginalized, and oppressed.
- True community upholds the worth of persons while providing a healthy alternative to self-centeredness, isolation, and conformity.
- Sacred community provides nurture and growth opportunities for all people, especially those who cannot fully care for themselves.
- We value our connections and share a strong sense of trust and belonging with one another—even if we never have met.
- Some disciples are called and ordained to particular priesthood responsibilities and ministries for the sake of the community, the congregation, and the world.
- We are called to create communities of Christ's peace in our families and congregations and across villages, tribes, nations, and throughout creation.

*Our Enduring Principles define the essence, heart and soul of our faith community. They describe the personality of our church as expressed throughout the world.