

Prayers for Peace, Hope and Justice Prayer: Poverty in South Africa

A local news item this week stated that the city of Cape Town has obtained further eviction notices for homeless people on the streets. The city had convinced the court that it has viable plans to manage the estimated 14 000 people on the streets. It has about 3 500 shelter beds for part of this process. The news came during a severe winter rainstorm. Other government departments and NGOs also provide daily actions and services for the homeless. These highly visible, people are among the poorest of the poor. They are othered, vilified as druggies, dirty people, thieves and even feared for aggressive begging behaviour.

But we are aware that the homeless are a portion of a bigger poverty issue for us. Approximately 55.5% or 30.3m people in RSA, live in poverty at the national upper level of R992 pm. They live on the streets, in informal settlements, in community dwellings, in institutions and in ordinary homes. They are our poor.

13.8 m South Africans are said to experience food poverty. While the South African Poverty Levels have fallen since 1994, in actual figures at least another 2.5 m more South Africans have become poor.

Multi-dimensional poverty is the bigger picture. Poverty is not just the lack of money. Poor people experience poverty much more broadly. The poor can suffer multiple disadvantages at the same time. There could be limited schooling, an inability to provide clean water or cooking fuel, no proper shelter, no access to support services, they may have no income at all. They are babies, children, the frail aged, many have significant general health issues including mental illness and disability. Direct income, while vital, is only one facet of the poverty burden for poor people.

How do we respond as church. As Christ followers.

*In 1968 Martin Luther King led the poor people's campaign with a caravan of mules to Washington. On one was a sign: **don't laugh, Jesus was a poor man.***

Let us pray

Precious Lord of all creation, restore a right spirit within us. A spirit of your love, compassion and care. We pray for the poor, lord, in all its multidimensional elements. The pain, from the vulnerable homeless to the fragile aged in homes...and specially the children...in our beautiful land.

O father, mother, God, nurturer of goodness and mercy. Forgive our arguments and rationalizations. Our comfort barns of security blind us to a deeper reality.

O God, you weep at our institutionalized discrimination. We often misuse charity and gifting and voluble utterances as surrogates for care, forgetting our own complicity in the formal, institutional and accepted value systems of hoarding.

Lord, that systematically denies vulnerable humans, hope, dignity and life.

We pray for, and are thankful for, all the activities of rescue, empowerment, and care by good people, organizations and the state.

We pray for more depth of understanding.

We pray that we will walk nearer to you each day as we face this injustice. Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.