

Prayer Service: United Nations Day for the Eradication of Poverty

Items needed:

- Copy of photographs of people around the world living in poverty (Resource included with the service)
- Bible and candle
- Basket, a bell or chime
- 9 participants/readers

Prior to beginning service, cut the provided photo sheets and place the photos of women, men, and children in the basket. Place Bible (opened to Matthew 25: 31-40), the candle, and the basket on a small table. Invite participants to come and take one of the photos. If the group is large, you may pass the basket among those present.

Call To Prayer: A chime or bell may be sounded. Invite a participant to light the candle.

Leader: Today, October 17th, we join with people from every corner of our world to commemorate the United Nations International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. We bring to our circle of prayer the cries of our sisters and brothers who fall victim to poverty.

Poverty eradication is a central tenet of both national and international development agendas, yet, despite some progress, millions remain mired in abject poverty. As Navi Pillay, the High Commissioner for Human Rights states, “The fact that almost three billion people live in poverty and that 20 per cent of the world’s people hold 70 per cent of its total income means that we have not kept our promises [to each other].”



Poverty and its web of inter-related conditions, such as economic and social inequality, often intersect with other conditions including gender discrimination and the lack of access to educational opportunities, health care, sanitation, clean water, and decent work. One of the root causes of our failure to eliminate poverty is the absence of a human rights framework in addressing poverty eradication (*Pathways to Poverty Eradication: Civil Society Perspective 2012*).

Reader 1: Let us ready ourselves to listen to the Gospel message [*A chime or bell may be sounded*]:

Matthew 25: 37-40

I was hungry and you gave me no food.
I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink.
I was a stranger and you gave me no welcome; naked and you gave me no clothing.
I was ill and in prison and you did not visit me.

[Pause for a moment of silence]

All: Lord, when was it that I saw you hungry?

Reader 2: Hunger is the world’s number one health risk. It kills more people than AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis combined.

All: Lord, when was it that I saw you hungry?

Reader 3: 925 million people do not have enough to eat—more than the populations of the United States, Canada, and Europe combined.

All: Lord, when was it that I saw you hungry?

Reader 1: Sixty percent of the world’s hungry are women. Fifty percent of pregnant women in developing countries lack proper maternal care, resulting in over 300,000 maternal deaths annually from childbirth.

All: Lord, when was it that I saw you hungry?

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Reader 2: 1.4 billion people in developing countries live on \$1.25 a day or less.

All: Lord, when was it that I saw you hungry?

Reader 3: Seventy-five percent of the world's poorest people – 1.4 billion women, children, and men – live in rural areas and depend on agricultural and related activities for their livelihood. Fifty percent of hungry people are farming families.

All: Lord, when was it that I saw you hungry?

Reader 1: 1.7 billion people lack access to water. 2.3 billion suffer from water-borne diseases each year. 12 percent of the world's population uses 85 percent of its water, and none of the 12 percent lives in developing countries.

All: Lord, when was it that I saw you hungry?

Reader 2: According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) 2011 report, the United States has the second-highest rate of childhood poverty in the developed world.

All: Lord, when was it that I saw you hungry?

Reader 3: Among poor children in America, race and ethnicity are significant indicators for outcomes regarding a host of health-related issues, including birth weight, exposure to lead, and access to adequate food and medical care.

Sing Refrain: The Lord hears the cry of the poor; blessed be the Lord. (2x)

Leader: Invite participants to reflect.

Each person who lives in poverty has a unique story – a story of pain, struggles, hopes, and dreams. Do you see poverty as simply a fact of life? Is it such a huge problem that it cannot be overcome? Is that a reason not even to try? Or, if we should try, what is one thing you can do to address the roots of this poverty?

During your reflection, hold the photo of the person in the palm of your hand. Look at that photo for a few moments and begin a dialogue with that person – let him or her talk to you – listen, then respond – but not just today. Take that person with you. Carry the photo with you. Renew the dialogue each day for a week. What are you learning about your companion and what is your companion learning about you? As you respond to that companion, you may learn something about yourself as well.



Reflections from: *"Pathways to Poverty Eradication: Civil Society Perspective 2012"*

Reader 4: The UN Human Rights Council's Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights address key elements of meaningful participation, non-discrimination, and accountability as integral to the way forward. These principles are founded on the indivisibility and interdependence of the civic, social, cultural, political, and economic rights of all people.

Reader 5: According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), investing two percent of global gross domestic product in protecting the environment can initiate a transition towards a low carbon, resource efficient green economy that would have a positive impact on all sectors of society. It is central to the eradication of poverty. The extractive industries need to come under more stringent control as the livelihoods they eradicate by polluting fisheries, farmland, forests, etc. cannot be compensated by investments.

Reader 4: Social development in today's globalized world necessitates addressing the systemic causes of poverty and inequality. The economic, political and social structures that sustain poverty and unjust relations must be transformed so as to rebalance the extremes of poverty and wealth throughout the world. The Guiding Principles provide practical guidance on how to operationalise the obligations of States to respect, protect, and fulfill the rights of all persons living in extreme poverty.

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Reader 5: As a result of the global financial and economic crisis, public spending for social development has decreased, but military spending has continued to increase. The continued emphasis on military spending as a means of providing security and stability, both nationally and globally, does not address the root causes of insecurity and instability. Reducing military expenditures by even 2% and allocating that money to addressing these root causes would greatly advance peace and development, the real foundation of the security and stability of a nation. Because global military spending has a direct impact on people living in poverty and the environment, there can be no serious commitment to poverty eradication by the United Nations Member States without addressing it.

Prayers of the Faithful

Response: “*Someone’s crying, God, Kumba yah*” (sing)

Reader 6: We pray that governments, civil society, and people living in poverty can work together in programs that address the root causes of poverty, promote systemic change, and eliminate inequalities so as to achieve a just and productive society for all.

All: “*Someone’s dying, God, Kumba yah*” (sing)

Reader 7: We pray that governments adopt and implement the Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights presented by the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights.

All: “*Someone’s hungry, God, Kumba yah*” (sing)

Reader 6: We pray that all governments provide public investments in physical and social infrastructures, and enabling environments and necessary resources for those involved in agricultural production and distribution.

All: “*Someone’s thirsty, God, Kumba yah*” (sing)

Reader 7: We pray that all governments of developing countries with large rural populations implement social and economic policies and programs that provide small landholders, landless laborers, and women the opportunity to earn a livelihood and contribute to their communities.

All: “*Someone’s trusting, God, Kumba yah*” (sing)

Leader 6: Because global military spending has a direct impact on people living in poverty, we pray that all governments reduce military spending by even 2%, and allocate that money to addressing the root causes of poverty thus greatly advancing economic justice for all.

All: “*Someone’s hoping, God, Kumba yah*” (sing)

Resources

- The Hunger Project: www.thp.org
- The Recession’s Ongoing Impact on America’s Children
<http://www.firstfocus.net/sites/default/files/Recessions%20Ongoing%20Impact%20on%20Americas%20Children.pdf>
- Measuring Child Poverty: New league tables of child poverty in the world’s rich countries
http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/rc10_eng.pdf



CLOSING PRAYER

I dare to pray:

God, let the world be changed,
For I long to see the end of poverty;

I dare to pray:

God, let the rules be changed,
For I long to see our economic structures
Bring justice to the poor;

I dare to pray:

God, let my life be changed,
For I long to bring hope
Where the Good News is needed.

In the strength of your spirit
And inspired by your compassion,
I make this promise to work for change,
And wait confidently for the day
When you make all things new
And those that weep will rejoice.

~ *Adapted from prayer by Peter Graystone*