



# Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



2084 Wilson Pike · Franklin, TN 37067 · 615.794.2665  
Pastor Dennis Meaker: 615.794.2665 · djmeaker@gmail.com

April 10, 2013

## Who Are the Poor? Part Two

[Based upon a Presentation by Dr. Douglas Meeks, Professor of Wesleyan Studies at Vanderbilt Divinity School]

<sup>20</sup> *Then he looked up at his disciples and said:  
“Blessed are you who are poor,  
for yours is the kingdom of God. Luke 6:20 NRSV*

<sup>31</sup> *Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker,  
but those who are kind to the needy honor him. Pr 14:31 NRSV*

In the first part of this series I laid out the five dimensions of poverty described in scripture. Poverty as used in this article means being shut out of society, or marginalized, due to the lack of some resource held in abundance, or controlled, by others. The five dimensions of poverty are Economic Poverty, Poverty of Health, Political Poverty, Cultural Poverty and Spiritual Poverty. Each of the five types of poverty can be readily identified in our society and scripture challenges us to act to prevent oppression of these people.

The easiest form of poverty for us to recognize is **Economic Poverty**; those who lack sufficient economic resources to care for themselves and their families. It is easy to see those around us who fall into that category if we will look. The problem is, often we choose not to look. Many passages of scripture challenge us to address the immediate needs of those living in poverty. Two of the strongest are those cited in last week's article. In Isaiah 58:7 Isaiah, speaking for God, declares that the worship that God desires is feeding the hungry, caring for the homeless and clothing the naked. It is likely this passage that Jesus had in mind when he described the judgment of the nations in Matthew 25:31-46:

<sup>34</sup> *Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; <sup>35</sup> for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup> I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’*

*'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'*

What you did for (or to) the least of these you did for (or to) Christ. Scripture repeatedly calls on those who have been blessed with economic wealth to help those who are economically poor.

Some insist that it is better to “teach someone to fish” than to give them fish. This is probably true as far as it goes. But take note in our society that programs to teach people “to fish” are being cut, and even when offered are often not accompanied by assistance to obtain food and shelter and other necessities while being “taught to fish.” A program that can’t be accessed by those it’s designed for might as well not exist. As a closing note to Economic Poverty, consider the observation of the writer of James:

*<sup>14</sup> What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? <sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, <sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? <sup>17</sup> So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. James 2:14-17*

**Poverty of Health** is also a problem in our nation. If you do not have your health you may not be able to work and earn a decent living. I recall a woman in her mid-thirties who came to West Nashville UMC for our community meals. She had worked for the State as an accountant until she suffered injuries in an automobile accident with an uninsured driver. She suffered some brain damage and could no longer work as an accountant. She lost her health insurance, her home and her family.

When describing how the People of Israel failed to be a people of God the prophet Ezekiel identified their failure to look after the poor and injured:

*Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, you shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? <sup>3</sup> You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fatlings; but you do not feed the sheep. <sup>4</sup> You have not strengthened the weak, you have not healed the sick, you have not bound up the injured, you have not brought back the strayed, you have not sought the lost, but with force and harshness you have ruled them. Ezekiel 34:2-4 NRSV*

In contrast scripture notes that Jesus was moved by compassion when he saw the sick. Matthew 14:14. Suffering Poverty of Health is really little different than economic poverty. In fact, in this nation, overwhelming medical bills are the direct or contributing cause of 62% of all bankruptcies according to a 2009 study. Scripture calls upon us to care about, and address, this issue. However we choose to address the problems of health care in this country we cannot, as faithful Christians, pretend the problem does not exist.

**Political Poverty** may be, but is not always, closely associated with economic poverty. It exists where a particular group has very little political power and can be oppressed by those with that power. The Prophet Amos condemned the oppression of the poor and identified it as a major failing of the people of Israel. Amos 2:6-7. Amos 5:12.

Political power is often obtained through the use of wealth, and lack of wealth leaves groups vulnerable to those able to purchase political support. The most prominent example of political poverty in our history is the treatment of African Americans. For one hundred years after the Civil War they lacked any meaningful voice in this nation’s politics despite their numbers, economic, educational and cultural contributions. Among the groups experiencing political poverty in this nation today are active duty military who are paid wages that

leave them impoverished and veterans who cannot obtain the benefits to which they are entitled. For instance, since members of our military are underpaid they are often victimized by unscrupulous lenders. However, those lenders also have considerable lobbying power in Congress and the State legislatures. Such lenders are found in large numbers around all military bases and little is done by the government to stop them from preying upon underpaid military families. Nothing is done by Congress to address the underlying problem of their poor wages.

Veterans of wars from Viet Nam, Korea, The Gulf War, Iraq and Afghanistan are waiting months or more than a year to obtain the benefits promised to them and the situation has only gotten worse as the number of injured veterans has grown. While military vendors with powerful lobbies and political support have gotten rich on these wars we have virtually abandoned the veterans who have sacrificed their health and well-being for our benefit. The military vendors have the political capital to spend, the veterans do not.

Those who are unemployed and dependent upon assistance from the government for subsistence are also among the politically impoverished. This was demonstrated in the recent financial meltdown of the mortgage industry. Billions were devoted to bailing out the banks “too big to fail” while many individuals were ignored as their homes were taken away. Individuals, as opposed to the financial institutions, did not have the political clout to obtain meaningful assistance. They were politically impoverished.

One last group experiencing political poverty is undocumented aliens. This last group is particularly interesting. For decades, indeed a majority of the twentieth century, the nation relied upon the work of undocumented aliens. They became an integral part of the economy that everyone knew about but that the authorities largely ignored. These people often worked for less than minimum wages, paid taxes and social security but benefited from neither. Politically they have no voice at all.

Political poverty inevitably leads to oppression which Amos proclaims is contrary to God’s laws. The Apostle Paul was even more blunt. He declared rulers and authorities (governments) potential adversaries to God’s reign:

*<sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. <sup>11</sup> Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. <sup>12</sup> For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Ephesians 6:10-12 NRSV*

Is all government to be equated with evil? Of course not. But Paul does not allow us to pass the burden of correcting oppression and inequity to the government. Paul reminds us that it is not sufficient to simply note that some group has oppressed another lawfully or that another’s benefits were denied after a “fair hearing.” At the core of the Gospel is the Greatest Commandment: Love God and love one another. Matthew 22:34-40. If we ignore a group’s political poverty, and the oppression and inequity that follows, we fail to demonstrate God’s love for the members of that group.

Closely related to the concept of Political Poverty is **Cultural Poverty**. Cultural Poverty exists where a people are discouraged from experiencing their cultural heritage or prevented from expressing their cultural identity. The classic example in the Old Testament is found in the Book of Daniel. The exiles in Babylon are prohibited from following the Torah and punished when they protest.

Current examples of Cultural Poverty exist within the immigrant communities in this nation, most especially among the Hispanics and Muslims. That may seem an unusual assertion with regard to Hispanics

given the abundance of Mexican and South American restaurants, groceries and entertainment in our midst but I believe it is accurate. Much of the anti-immigrant animosity seems to me to be directed toward Hispanics, probably because of the large number of undocumented Hispanic immigrants. It is difficult to celebrate your cultural identity if you are surrounded by people who hate you for that identity.

Animosity toward Muslims is also not difficult to understand after 9/11. But we have carried that animosity to extremes as we have attempted to stop Muslim worship and even attempted to legislate against Islam. Yet Muslims have been a part of our history from the beginning. A significant percentage of African slaves brought to the country in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were Muslim. The first Mosques were built around one hundred years ago. Until 9/11 Muslims were largely free to practice their faith among us. Now they are likely to be the target of hate attacks.

In looking for the scriptural response to the issue of Cultural Poverty we begin with the Torah. Thus in Deuteronomy 10:17-20 we find the following:

*<sup>17</sup> For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, <sup>18</sup> who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. <sup>19</sup> You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.*

See also, Job 31:32; Ps 94:6; Ps 146:9; Matthew 25:35. God commanded the people to remember that they were once strangers and should therefore show hospitality to strangers. Jesus said the same. Matthew 25:35. Indeed, the parable of the Good Samaritan is essentially the story of a stranger showing hospitality and brotherly concern to another stranger.

The “other,” the one not like us, is often distrusted and indeed from time to time is a threat. But we too often class whole peoples as “others” and seek to isolate them, placing a price upon maintaining their cultural identity. However, as the Apostle Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 12, God created us in all our diversity and we need that diversity. Must we find a solution to the problems of immigration? Of course. Do we need to protect ourselves from Islamic and other Terrorists? Again, of course. But, we are also Christians and called to live as the Body of Christ, welcoming the stranger. Indeed, many of those we seek to isolate as “other” are, in fact, our brothers in sisters in Christ; fellow Christians. This is especially true of many Hispanic immigrants. Do we value our national identity more than our Christian identity?

Finally, there is **Spiritual Poverty**. Spiritual Poverty can be thought of as **not knowing** that you need God. Spiritual Poverty occurs whenever we place something other than God at the center of our lives. In the article last week I gave a number of examples from scripture of Spiritual Poverty.

Our response to Spiritual Poverty is dictated by Matthew 28:19:

*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*

Our call as the Church is to offer the Gospel, to offer Christ, to the World. Addressing Spiritual Poverty will include addressing the problems of Economic Poverty, Poverty of Health, Political Poverty and Cultural Poverty wherever we find them. Addressing Spiritual Poverty means living as the Body of Christ and offering the Salvation of Christ to the world.

## **THE BISHOP'S CEDAR CREST SCHOLARSHIP FUND**

Bishop McAlilly has challenged the Churches of the Tennessee Conference to help children attend summer camp who otherwise would be unable to go. The program is outlined below.

**GOAL:** To raise a minimum of 63 (Bishop McAlilly's football number) scholarships for 63 children to attend summer camp at Cedar Crest this summer (2013).

**CHILDREN:** New partnerships will be developed from varied churches and programs for children. Key camp recruitment groups are:

- Project Transformation
- Bethlehem Center
- Small Membership Churches
- Churches Serving Diverse and Ethnic Communities
- Children of Deployed Military Families

### **HOW THE PROGRAM WORKS:**

- The Board of Camp and Retreat Ministries is leading the way in partnership with the Bishop to furnish scholarships. To date 11 scholarships have been raised or pledged from the Bishop and the Board.
- Each District Superintendent has agreed to provide one scholarship from their district funds. This represents 7 scholarships.
- Each DS will be identifying small membership and ethnic churches who might partner with Camp and Retreat Ministries (CRM) by recruiting children for camp and/or raising money for scholarships.
- Each DS and Board member will be contacting individuals and larger churches who would be willing to furnish matching scholarships for the children in their district.
- The total Goal will be to raise a minimum of \$18,900 for 63 scholarships for children within the Tennessee Conference who otherwise would not be able to attend camp.

### **HOW YOU CAN PARTICIPATE:**

Everyone in the Tennessee Conference is invited to partner with the Bishop and The Board of Camp and Retreat Ministry by:

- Recruiting at least one child from your church for a faith forming summer camp experience at Cedar Crest this summer.
- Raising or providing a scholarship of \$300 for a child who otherwise would or could not attend camp.
- Celebrating Camp and Retreat Sunday in your church by sharing your camp experience with your congregation and encouraging them to be involved in recruiting children for a great summer camp experience at Cedar Crest.
- Please visit [www.tnumcamps.org](http://www.tnumcamps.org) for the 2013 Summer Camp Schedule and online registration.

Please send all scholarship funds to:

**The Bishop's Cedar Crest Scholarship Fund  
Reverend Dickie Hinton  
P.O. Box 414  
Monterey, Tennessee 38574**

### **The Problem of Personal Information**

At one time it was not unusual to distribute lists of birthdays and other personal information within the Church. Such lists can still be created today if people wish to add their names to them. However, despite many requests to the contrary, I have chosen not to put information about birth dates, other than birth month, or other personal information, in the newsletter. Once this information has been posted in an online newsletter it is available to everyone. Our birth dates are an important piece of personal information that can be used as part of

an effort to steal someone's identity. For much the same reason we do not post addresses and telephone numbers of members and we do not publish information about who is in the hospital. If a thief knew that someone was in the hospital they might take the opportunity to target that person's home for a break-in. The potential misuse of online information is something that we all need to be careful about.

## **7 Things That Hold A Church Back** (Based on a presentation by Rev. Matthew Hartsfield, pastor Van Dyke Church)

The opening session of the Real ideas Conference set the tone for the rest of the workshops. What holds us back from offering the gospel is most often internal and not external. Using Ephesians 2:14-21, Rev. Mark Hartsfield talked about seven things that hold a church back; i.e. that keeps it from offering the Gospel throughout its community.

Ephesians 2:14-21 says:

*<sup>14</sup> When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, \* <sup>15</sup> the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. \* <sup>16</sup> I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. <sup>17</sup> Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. <sup>18</sup> And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. <sup>19</sup> May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.*

*<sup>20</sup> Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. <sup>21</sup> Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen. NLT*

### **The 7 Things Holding us Back**

1. **Staying on our feet.** *When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father.* We fail because we fail to pray. The beginning and ending point for any activity in the church should be prayer. Rev. Hartsfield went on to suggest we think of prayer in "4D", four dimensions. We pray in recognition of our total dependence upon God. We pray because we are desperate for God's grace in our lives. We pray out of a desire to live as a people of God, the Body of Christ. And we pray because we delight in God. Prayer for our daily ministries is as important as prayer for those who are suffering hardships.
2. **Forgetting who made us and our church.** *The Creator of everything in heaven and on earth.* Our church was not established by a group of people in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Trinity UMC was established by God. Just as we are all God's creation, so is the church, and all its many congregations, God's creation. We should cultivate the mindset that Trinity UMC is God's Church and not our Church.
3. **Living With a Scarcity Mentality.** *I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit.* We might ask, "Do we have the resources to offer the Gospel effectively in this community?" That's essentially what the disciples asked when Christ told them to feed the five thousand with a few loaves and fishes. Living with a scarcity mentality can also turn us into hoarders, afraid to use the resources we do have for fear that they will be dissipated. Instead we

should begin every ministry prayerfully, with whatever we have, trusting that God's blessings can provide us with all that we will need to carry through on the ministry.

4. **Keeping Christ from feeling at home in the church.** *Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong.* Are we doing things that keep Christ from feeling at home in the Church? Remember every invitation we extend is an invitation extended to Christ. Every time we welcome someone into our Church we welcome Christ. I was leading the Conference training on inclusiveness this past weekend. A participant was asking about the concept of welcoming all people in the name of Christ when that person was not of the same social class as the rest of the members. She pointed out that the people attending her Church dressed very formally for worship services, and it was embarrassing when people who "did not know how to dress appropriately" came into their Church. As gently as I could I suggested that Christ was probably comfortable with their dress so perhaps the church members could be as well. Trinity UMC has always been, in my experience, a very welcoming church. But we must constantly be aware of those things we might be doing that communicates to a visitor that they are not welcome
  
5. **Forgetting how much God loves us and our Church.** <sup>18</sup> *And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is.* <sup>19</sup> *May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.* I have heard many of our members say that they love Trinity UMC. Some of our members have spent their whole lives here, attending Sunday School and worship, growing in faith and love, being married here, baptizing their children here and being eulogized here. People who have spent much less time here nevertheless love this Church. But have we forgotten that God loves this church and its people as much as we love the church and its people? God has been present for every profession of Faith, every Baptism, every wedding every funeral. God is present with us when we worship and when we gather for fellowship. Because God loves the church, God desires to see it vital and thriving just as we desire to see it vital and thriving.
  
6. **Growing a Self-Powered Church.** *Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.* We become tired. We have so many demands upon our time that we can become overwhelmed at the thought of the church making demands as well. And, we can start to see some people as indispensable to the ministries of the Church. We must always remember that the ministries of the Church are God's ministries and not our ministries. Whatever tomorrow holds for us, regardless of the presence or absence of specific people, we must seek God's help to empower our ministries and to keep offering ministry. No one person can do all the work, or even most of the work. But, with God's help and working together there is much that we can accomplish.
  
7. **Thinking Small.** <sup>20</sup> *Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.* <sup>21</sup> *Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen.* God wants us to succeed BIG. As often as not, rather than our plans being too grandiose they are too small. Too limited. When we began a feeding ministry at West Nashville UMC we thought it might be an evening meal of soup and sandwiches for 20 or thirty people. Five years later it was an evening meal for over one hundred people and a dispersal point for thousands of pounds of groceries for the poor in the neighborhood. The theological concept is that God wants to bless us with more than we even dare ask. Rev. Hartsfield suggested that we practice "adding a zero" to requests. If we want a Vacation Bible School for 20 kids, plan for 200. If we set a goal of attracting 10 new families to the church, instead plan for 100.

As I was listening to this presentation, I was reflecting on my own experience in ministry with six churches. I have never served a church that had to overcome all of these attitudes, but I have seen examples of all of them between the six churches. I think that the key thing we must keep in mind is that we are called to offer the gospel in this community. There are around 10,000 people living within a three mile radius of Trinity UMC. Many are people who of fallen away from the church and thousands are people who have never heard the Gospel in any meaningful way. Bishop McAlilly is calling us to look at our communities as mission fields, and they surely are. As a church, let us rededicate ourselves to offering the Gospel of Jesus Christ to this community.

## **Prayer Ministry**

The following persons have agreed to be part of the prayer ministry at Trinity UMC:

Elva Beard	Sarah Jordan	Kenneth Stevens	Judy Richardson
Larry Eastwood	Mac McAfee	Patricia Stevens	Charles Wilson
Leslie Eastwood	Rachel Newman	Sam Richardson	

The members of the prayer ministry of Trinity United Methodist church covenant with one another to pray daily for:

- Those concerns on the prayer list of the Church and for healing of body and spirit for all persons listed;
- For each ministry of the church that each ministry would work to bring the Gospel to those within our community and most especially to bring the Gospel to those who have not yet accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior;
- For all the members of the Trinity UMC community that they be led and enabled to live as the Body of Christ;
- For our local community and all its needs, especially for those who are struggling with the burden of poverty;
- For our nation and our world that God help lead the people of the world to live in peace with God's Kingdom.

If you would like to be a part of this ministry (or if you have already spoken to me about it and were inadvertently left off the list) please let me know and I will see that you are added.

## **Up-Coming Sermons**

**April 14: If You Love Me.** All the gospels record that Peter denied Jesus three times. The Gospel of John records a resurrection appearance of Jesus where Jesus asks the same question three times: Do You Love me? My texts are Acts 9:1–6 (7–20) and John 21:1–19.

**April 21: The Lord Is My Shepherd.** Perhaps the best known passage out of the Old Testament is psalm 23. Let us pray through this Psalm as a congregation, considering its meaning for our lives. My texts are John 10:22–30 and psalm 23.

## Worship Leaders Schedule

### April 14

Tom Moore, *Liturgist*  
Sam Richardson & Larry Eastwood, *Ushers*  
Tommy & Jo Cotton, *Greeters*  
*Counter*

### April 21

Marty Bauguess, *Liturgist*  
Rodger & Cherry Klein, *Ushers*  
Maurice & Joyce Edwards, *Greeters*  
*Counter*

## Announcements

**Sundays at 10:00:** The topic for discussion this Sunday (April 14) will be, **“Does Prayer Really Change Anything?”**

This group meets in a Sunday School Classroom. All are welcome to enjoy fellowship with your church family and deepen your spiritual connection with God. **Nanette Crowell** leads this study and will be happy to answer any questions you might have.

**Sunday school starts at 9:45am** in the Fellowship Hall.

**Wednesday, April 10, 7:00pm** Choir Rehearsal

**Saturday, April 13, 9:00am. “Clean the Pews” day.** All are welcome to come help clean the pews prior to the installation of the fabric on the pews. We’re planning to use Murphy’s Oil Soap and cloths for the cleaning. So, bring your bucket and join the sisters and brothers as we have fellowship and fun while we clean.

The **61<sup>st</sup> UMC** is in need of men’s clothing. When you clean your closets, please consider donating men’s items of clothing to a worthy cause. Bring clothes to the church and they will be taken to 61<sup>st</sup> UMC.

The dates for our church to prepare and serve dinner at **61<sup>st</sup> Street** are as follows: **May 18, August 17, November 16.**

We will also be participating at the Christmas Toy Store, dates TBD.

## April Birthdays

Mary Coleman, Houston Hartsock, Colette Keyser, Jo Oliphant, Betty Whitefield