

People in Purple

Volume 1

Who and Why People are Homeless?

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FOREWORD

Washington State Representative Sharon Tomiko Santos

We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly (The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Letter from a Birmingham Jail)

People in Purple presents powerful testimony about one of the most persistent and pervasive problems in human history: homelessness. Volume 1 outlines who is affected by homelessness and why. In fact, homelessness leaves no demographic untouched: the working poor, the mentally ill, the young, the old, and people of every race, culture, and identity. The problem of homelessness is ubiquitous, present in communities small and large, urban, suburban and rural, all across America. The question and challenge we collectively face is what can and what should we do to solve this problem?

Homelessness is a complex and complicated condition. Our response to it must be similarly comprehensive, sustainable, and transformative; there are no *easy* solutions. Indeed, just trying to *define* homelessness is fraught with difficulty.

But by improving our understanding about the root causes of homelessness, we can better halt the expansion of the homeless population AND we can better serve those who currently experience homelessness or who are at risk of becoming homeless.

The Rev. Dr. Jean Kim is the right person to help us understand and confront the problems of homelessness and to tell the stories of the men, women, youth and children who live with the consequence of inadequate affordable housing. For more than 4 decades, she has worked to confront and eradicate poverty and homelessness as a state-certified social worker and mental health counselor as well as the founder of the Church of Mary Magdalene, an urban ministry for homeless women in Seattle. She is a passionate crusader for “Ending

Homelessness” wherever and however it exists.

People in Purple is the *magnum opus* in which the Rev. Dr. Kim makes the Gospel concrete and relevant while dispensing insight and wisdom accumulated through a lifetime commitment to serving homeless people and to solving the problem of homelessness. Her faith is deeply pragmatic and simple as so plainly framed in her “lingerie theology,” a belief in every woman’s entitlement to personal dignity symbolized through the collection and distribution of unused undergarments for homeless women. In this way, she personifies the words of Helen Keller who noted, “I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to accomplish small tasks as if they were great and noble.” In writing *People in Purple*, I think Rev. Kim accomplishes a task both great and noble.

If asked, most of us would affirm that we want to and should do more to solve the problem of homelessness. Yet, in sharing the parable of the homeless woman who is unwelcomed at worship service because her presence offends the sensibilities of the congregation, the Rev. Dr. Kim reminds us that homelessness is not merely the absence of a permanent roof over one’s head. In these volumes, she helps us see the faces of all of the homeless . . . and it is like looking in a mirror.

People in Purple is a relevant and timely resource for policymakers, pastors, providers, and the public at large. Read it. Share it. Above all, act upon it.

Sharon Tomiko Santos, Representative
The Washington State House of Representatives
PO Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504
February 9, 2015

PREFACE

What would you do if you lost your job or you keep applying for a new job but cannot find one? As time goes on you are unable to pay rent and get evicted from your housing. You have no cash in your pocket, no saving in the bank and suddenly you are on the streets with no one to turn to. It will be worse if it happens in the winter time with health problems. It is still worse if you are a woman and/or have young children. This is the story of many who experience homelessness. I call this situation “a crisis like a fire, a tornado, and a flood.”

To those who have no close contact with the homeless people, they might appear to have able bodies but are lazy. So you may easily say, “If they only work they wouldn’t be homeless.” Many of those homeless friends whom I serve look fine but display inability to keep appointments, promises, follow up on assignments and tasks, keep time, and often they are disorganized and clumsy. Looking at them on the outside, they look just fine. But the longer and the deeper I get to know them by frequent contact, I am able to understand the deeper meanings of their behavior and symptoms displayed by the homeless. Therefore, in this chapter, “*Who and why people are homeless*” we will look at the homeless issue from a variety of circumstances and standpoints.

I speak to hundreds of churches on the issue of homelessness. The most frequently asked question is “why are people homeless?” I am very naïve to think that most Americans would know why people are homeless. I am nearly shocked to realize the lack of understanding on the issue. A friend of mine fed many homeless people hot meals in Seattle downtown for years. She fed them without personally associating with them by sitting with, listening to, talking and eating with them. She just handed out plates full of good food. Her long experience in feeding them didn’t help her understand why people are homeless and why it takes so long for them to get out of it. Being disappointed for not seeing any change in their lives, she quit feeding them and moved on to the overseas mission.

I hear Korean immigrant friends, perhaps other immigrants too, often say, “We have made it as foreigners in this country with language and cultural barriers. Why can’t they make it with their own native tongues in their own country? They are responsible for their plight.” My African American friends say, “We have made it through such harsh racial discrimination and poverty, why can’t they make it? It is all their fault.” Most people think “If they are only willing to work they will make it.”

The other day I saw a man standing at the intersection with a sign that reads, ‘Homeless, Help.’ He was tall, well-built, healthy and strong looking young man. I was thinking instantly what people would say when they see this man. “Only if he wants to work he won’t have to beg.” Such lack of understanding motivates me to dig in deeply to find the root causes of

homelessness, not just from an individual behavioral standpoint but also from a socio economic-cultural- political perspective. We can't feel good by offering them hot meals, praying, singing and worshiping with them. We need to understand why those whom we love and serve, became homeless. If we truly understand the root causes of their homelessness in this affluent country, only then our perspective toward our homeless friends and the world we live in will look different. We then will be strongly motivated to do something about it. Therefore, as a citizen of this country, as a Christian, or a religious person, reviewing the root cause of homelessness and our relationship with them and responsibility for them might only be the right thing to do.

Why am I writing about the poor/homeless? For over 4 decades, as an immigrant, a licensed mental health counselor, a social worker and a Presbyterian minister, I have been serving the homeless people in the US. As I am approaching 80th birthday, I want to document all my experience, research and knowledge I have for the homeless, whom I call my family before any memory leaves my brain. This is my last gift that I am leaving for this world in hope that they will motivate my children, grandchildren as well as the younger generations coming after me to care for their poor/homeless neighbors around them by learning from my experience in serving them. I dare to hope that this series of five volumes can serve as a resource for individuals, churches, religious communities and teaching institutions that are interested in and concerned about the poor/homeless.

I also leave the entire proceeds from these books to and for the cost and related cost for the education and job/skill training of my homeless friends that they may get up and walk toward self-sufficiency and end their homelessness.

I present **definitions and terms** in relation to (physical) homeless issues that are developed by government agencies, and are being used by service providers. I also understand homelessness from multi-dimensional perspective – physical, emotional, social and spiritual. Each volume presents the description of each aspect of these homeless state.

Throughout all five volumes I have used **the poor/homeless** simultaneously as a single concept because all homeless are poor. Poverty is one of the major causes of homelessness and the poor are at a high risk of being homeless although not all the poor people are homeless.

Why five volumes? For the past 30 years I have been studying, speaking, writing, researching, and compiling resources on the homelessness issues. Summarizing many decades of work, study and experience in one book is so huge that I divide them in 5 stand-alone volumes under different themes in order to present the homelessness issue more comprehensively. Even though the focus of this proposal is on the first volume I have given a brief synopsis of the remaining four volumes in the series to put it in context.

Why the title of these volumes is “People in Purple?” I have been called

“Woman in Purple.” I earned the title from people who have seen me in a purple T-shirt every day since 1997. I chose the color purple when I developed a T-shirt with a message, “End Homelessness for all People” as part of the national campaign of the Presbyterian Church (USA) to end homelessness for all people. I have only worn purple since then.

Purple is the liturgical color of royalty and traditionally has been used during the season of Advent. Purple can also symbolize pain, suffering, and therefore mourning and penitence. It is also the liturgical color for the season of Lent: the time when Christians grieve, lament, and repent for Jesus’ suffering, reflect upon their lives in prayer and fasting, repent their personal and corporate sins, and commit to serve the Lord more faithfully. Likewise, in my purple T-shirt, I grieve, lament and repent for having so many homeless people in this affluent country, and commit to love and serve Jesus Christ by serving the homeless and to work toward ending homelessness. Personally it also represents my own pain, suffering and mourning of many tragedies and losses (in Korea as well as in the United States). The color purple has become not only my personal identity but also my homeless mission color. Because the color purple can also symbolizes pain, suffering, and mourning of homeless people who lost everything including their jobs, homes, families, identity, health, pride, joy and hopes, they deserve to be called “People in Purple.”

I hold the pain of my Lord, Jesus, dear homeless friends, and my own deep in my heart. My love for Jesus is my love for the homeless and my love for the homeless is my love for Jesus. As Jesus participates in my suffering and pain, I too participate in his as well as the homeless. Therefore, every day is Lent for me in my purple shirt. My life is a purple life, and I am called the “Woman in Purple.” I call the Great One “Jesus in Purple,” the service I offer “Ministry in Purple,” and my homeless friends “People in Purple.” Thus naturally the title of this book, this series of five volumes, is “People in Purple” because it is their story.

In Volume 1, I invite the readers to understand the meaning of homelessness and the reality and root causes of homelessness in the United States. I identify 45 areas of direct and/or indirect reality and root causes of homelessness. Only one of them is considered to be the personal and the rest are viewed from sociopolitical, economic and cultural perspectives. Also included are my own interview results on homelessness that includes opinions from 50 professional service providers/advocates, 50 from the general public and 50 homeless persons. I also identify 45 myths and present facts that challenge these myths and our incorrect understanding of homelessness. I included a brief comparison of the way the United States and Europe deal with poverty issues.

My view, understanding, analysis, interpretation and critique of the homeless issue may be basic but it comes from my experience of many decades in listening, talking and serving people who suffer from poverty/homelessness. I also quote other scholars’ opinions who have enriched me, hoping they will do the same for the readers.

How my writing is different from others? 1) Readers may get the full, in-depth and comprehensive picture on the reality and root causes of

poverty/homelessness in the United States by looking at the issue from 45 different perspectives in volume one. 2) While many people look at homelessness from physical standpoint, I define poverty/homelessness from multi-dimensional perspectives - physical, emotional, personal, corporate, economic, political, social, theological and spiritual. 3) I attempt to lead readers to realize that homelessness is not just someone else's problem but it can be our own issue too. 4) Readers may also come to understand that our myths on poverty/homelessness carry many distorted ideas; thus an opportunity may be open for them to correct their misunderstanding of homelessness. 5) Readers may also be enriched by variety of views of many scholars. 6) Readership mostly might come from religious/Christian communities, teaching institutions and people who are interested in serving the poor/homeless. The Presbyterians might appreciate this material more because it is the fruit of my 6-year speaking tour on behalf of the Presbyterian Church's Initiative to "End Homelessness."

I am deeply indebted to many local and national coalitions and scholars – economist, and theologians – who enriched and supplied me resources on the issue of the rich, poor, and the homeless. I owe huge thanks to Rep. Sharon Tomiko Santos of the Washing State House of Representatives, for writing the foreword for volume one. Heartfelt thanks to Rev. Paula Parker in Richmond, VA., for proofreading and editing my manuscript of volume one. Huge debts to Steve & Marcy Hong, Mickie Choi (Hoe) and Mia Park in California for offering me a room to hide and write without an interruption. I am grateful to Chan Hie Park, Cecilia Kim, Paul Han, Jasmine Valentine, Shin Hwa Park & Duk Nan Cho, Esther & Hana Na and Suhn Park in California for providing me with ways and means while I was writing away from home. Huge thanks to Nest Mission staff and Board for allowing me to go away to hide and write these volumes, and their support and encouragement. Last but not the least, thanks to my son, daughter-in-law, all my grandchildren, my nephew and his family for their support in numerous ways for this huge work of writing. This means I didn't write these volumes alone. It took a whole community of caring people. Without their support, encouragement and prayer these volumes could have never been a reality. However, above all, it was the abundant grace of God and inspiration of the Holy Spirt who motivated, walked with, sustained, and guided me throughout all these years, especially last year while I was writing.

A brief introduction on Volume 2 – 5: Volume 2 is about Biblical (Old and New Testament) studies and/or the theological positions on poverty/homelessness. After learning the troubling truth about how we have created poverty and homelessness in the U.S., readers may now raise a question as to how God sees this reality and if God is happy with the way we do homeless mission in the U.S. Thus, Volume Two is an attempt to discuss that question: what is the biblical position on poverty/homelessness?

I walked through the whole Bible trying to bring to light many deeply hidden insights to poverty/homelessness written in the Bible. The Bible has a multitude of indications of poverty/homeless situations. I reviewed God's and Jesus' position on

poverty/ homelessness who challenge, warn, indict, and sentence those who exploit and oppress the poor. Then I add St. Paul, James, and John’s position on poverty/homelessness. The final part of Volume Two is the critique of contemporary church mission including diagnosis and treatment. I hope that readers’ conscience may be awakened to the demand of God. Now after reading about the disturbing reality of poverty/homelessness in the U.S. and the Biblical position of them, some readers might ask “what must I do now?”

Volume 3 is an attempt to answer that question: For those who have read Volume One and Two and might be motivated to develop or be engaged in homeless mission but don’t know what to do and where to start. I present 106 mission ideas briefly. One of 106 ideas is public policy advocacy. I give an extended separate chapter for it because we won’t be able to end homelessness unless there is major public policy change. I then share my own experience of developing homeless missions from the scratch. What I try to say is that it doesn’t take any professional or big money to start a homeless mission. **Volume 4:** For those who read the first three volumes, some might wonder what others are doing and wish to visit some of them but cannot. Thus, in Volume Four I introduce the 103 of 155 homeless mission examples that I visited in the United States while I was on my speaking tour (1998-2004).

Volume 5 is a compilation of my 23 sermons and keynotes to general Christian churches/ groups focusing on the theme of the poor/homeless, and 32 sermons to the homeless church focusing on increasing self-esteem, pride, hopes and lead to restoration from poverty and homelessness, toward self-sufficient new life.

And in the end of each volume, I add an appendix to share my personal testimonies because many people having asked what motivated me to serve the poor/homeless as an immigrant. I confess that all of our life troubles, tragedies, illness and pains can motivate us to do something good for others and society with the help from God. And I also claim that it is my time to share the abundant blessings with the poor/homeless that I have received in this country, my new home.

I recommend those who are concerned or interested in homeless issues to read all five volumes in order to get the full perspectives of the poor/homeless.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Volume 1: Who and Why People are Homeless.



Jean Kim is a retired minister and a former staff of (national) Presbyterian Church (USA) for the issue of homelessness. She is also a Washington State certified social worker and a certified mental health counselor.

Jean Kim is an immigrant from South Korea to the United States in 1970. Since most of her career life in the U.S. – for over 4 decades - has been serving the homeless people up to the present.

Jean Kim is a graduate of Han Kuk Theological Seminary, Korea (BD in 1959), Dan Kuk University, Korea (BA in 1960), St. Louis University (MSW in 1977) and San Francisco Theological Seminary (D. Min in 2006).

Jean Kim is a founder and co-founder of 10 mission programs: Founder of Olive St. Social Club, Seattle (a day center for the homeless), Cherry St. Social Club, Seattle (a day center for the homeless), the Church of Mary Magdalene (of homeless women), Seattle, National Korean American Coalition for the Homeless, National Presbyterian Network to End Homelessness, Nest Mission for the homeless, Seattle, Regional Presbyterian Networks to End Homelessness (Washington State) and International Ministry at the University of Washington (Campus Ministry), Seattle; co-founder of the Agape Church for the Homeless, New Haven, CT and Korean Community Counseling Center, Seattle. She received 21 Community Service Awards/appreciation including Woman of Faith Award from Presbyterian Church (USA), Medal of Honor from Korean government and Hero of the Homeless from the Nightwatch in Seattle. She is a minister/social worker/mental health counselor for the homeless, an organizer, preacher, lecturer, workshop leader and writer on homelessness, domestic violence, women's issues, and clergy sexual misconduct.

OTHER BOOKS BY JEAN KIM

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2. Video: Jean Kim's End Homelessness (2000 in English).
3. Video: Jean Kim's End Homelessness (2000 with Korean caption)
4. Plant the Cross: Reality and Root Causes of homelessness (2008 in Korean).
5. Is Women's Leadership Acceptable as is Now (co-authored, 2009 in Korean).
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