

ABSTRACT

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Title of the D/P: A Critical Study of the Root Causes of Homelessness with Particular Attention Given to the Response of the Church

The scope of this dissertation is to review the root causes of homelessness in the context of the United States and to address the issue to the Christian Church, although it does not exclude others.

The goal is to achieve the followings; 1) help the Christian Church understand the root causes of homelessness from socio-economic, political, cultural and religious perspectives in the U.S. context; 2) help the Church build the biblical ground for their mission; and 3) guide the Church to engage passionately in public policy advocacy.

Methods used were: 1) a walking through nearly 100 books, fully or partially in areas of theology, economics, political science, sociology, medicine and ethics. 2) interviewing more than two hundred people in different groups on the issue of homelessness.

DISSERTATION:

The dissertation consists of two parts, Dissertation and Projects. Chapter 1 deals with the Problem related to homeless issue. Chapter 2 presents A) Social Analysis of our current socioeconomic, political and cultural systems and view them as root cause of the homelessness in the U.S. context.

“Our economic system and policies have produced unprecedented wealth and poverty with an ever-widening gap between the rich and poor. While the rich enjoy affluence, 35.9 million people suffer from poverty and 3.5 million people from homelessness each year. A growing number of families with children and the working poor are rapidly joining the homeless population. The problem is not that we do not have enough funds to end homelessness in the U.S. but that our government policy is to spend huge funds for war and tax cuts, rather than to solve the domestic poverty and homeless problem. The U.S. government appears to have a lack of political will, policy and interest in ending homelessness by continuing to slash funds for public assistance.”

Despite the fact that many Christian churches have been generous in giving charity, opening up the church building and offering direct and indirect services along with tremendous volunteer work for the homeless, they can never meet the growing needs of food, housing, jobs, education and medical treatment. However, few churches seem to be motivated to attack the root cause of homelessness.

Chapter 2, B) compares the U.S. and European Way of perceiving economic life, poverty and social services and help U.S. Churches and Christians see where we stand as a nation and people.

“95 percent of Europeans put helping others as the top of their list of priorities putting financial success dead last of the eight values ranked in the survey. In many respects, the European Dream is the mirror opposite of the American Dream. While the American

Dream emphasizes unrestrained economic growth, personal wealth, and the pursuit of individual self-interest, the European Dream focuses more on sustainable development, quality of life, and the community relationship over individual autonomy, cultural diversity over assimilation, quality of life over the accumulation of wealth, universal human rights and the rights of nature over property rights, and global cooperation over the unilateral exercise of power.”

Chapter 3, presents an extensive review on homelessness in the Old and the New Testament. In both Testaments, God and Jesus clearly stand with the oppressed homeless and demand strongly that loving God must be followed by loving our suffering neighbors. Both Testaments promise punishment for not following God’s requirements to help the poor/homeless and also promise blessings for those who walk with God in caring for the needy neighbors. Chapter 4, presents theological definition of mission which includes diagnosis (critique) and prescription for the restoration of mission.

The North American church has lost its identity because it has lost its mission. Therefore, the church suffers from mission amnesia and anemia. The central act of God in the Old and New Testament is a divine intervention into human history to liberate God’s people from oppression and slavery of all kinds - homelessness. The whole purpose of the mission of Christ’s Church is to participate in Christ’s suffering in the world. Christ suffered our suffering; he laid down his life for us. Now we are invited to participate in his suffering, the suffering of the world.

PROJECTS:

Projects were born out of interviews: Chapter 1 views the problem: Lack of policy and interests of the Government and the Church to end homelessness but maintain it by providing band-aid help. Chapter 2 presents a way of addressing the problem by interviewing professionals, lay and homeless people. Chapter 3 is the Project 1 reports - the finding from the survey of 150 people who lifted up *public policy, economic injustice and cultural attitudes* as root causes of perpetuating poverty and homelessness. Chapter 4, Project 2: From the interview of 60 people, 36 myths and facts on homelessness were drawn. This study breaks stereotype of blaming victims. Chapter 5, Project 3 presents Project -Recommendations: From the interview of 20 people came a compile of 25 public policy issues, narrowed down to 5 policy issues. The five public policy areas chosen are: 1) Medicaid; 2) Minimum Wage; 3) Supportive Housing; 4) Treatment and Discharge Plan for Mentally ill or Substance Addicted people; 5) Second Chance Act for those who have criminal history, all of which are significantly related to creating and perpetuating chronic homelessness. And therefore they must be changed. I then designed guidelines to prepare petitions to the U.S. and State Senators and Representatives on each policy. I developed a model of coordinating nine ecumenical/ interfaith/secular organizations for the co-sponsorship of the petition. Then I helped people practice to write letters, make phone calls or visit the state legislators to address the issues. Chapter 6, Project 4, presents examples of public policy advocacy: From the interview of an additional 10 professionals, examples of five of the most active public policy ministries of ecumenical / interfaith groups become available for the Church.