

Statement on Poverty for Religious Leader's Consultation on Poverty

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“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” To Christians, these words of Jesus from the Gospel of John speak of the power of the cross to contain and enfold all the horror, pain, and grief of the world in God’s uncompromising and enduring embrace of love.

Indeed, the very heart of the Christian faith is the knowledge that in Christ God has revealed the perfect ordering of all creation. “Through Christ,” Paul tells us, “God was pleased to reconcile all things to himself whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.” This peace is perfectly achieved in Christ, but remains sorely unrealized in our relationships with one another and the world around us. Thus, Paul makes clear, God “has given to *us* the ministry of reconciliation.”

How shall a Church called to the ministry of reconciliation respond to a world in which 10,000 of God’s children die of AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria each day? How are we to respond as poverty and disease create a generation of orphans in the developing world? What is our calling when education, health services, and access to clean water and sanitation—basic human rights—are unknown to large segments of God’s creation?

The *Millennium Development Goals* embody that work of the reconciliation we have been called to do. They are humanity’s response, indeed the Church’s response, to a world that stands desperately in need of repair and rebuilding. The MDGs reflect God’s passionate desire for justice and mercy, and the work of reconciliation we have been given.

The Episcopal Church’s General Convention has called all of us to support the Millennium Development Goals and to give of ourselves to see that they are fulfilled. Currently, more than 35 dioceses of the Episcopal Church are giving 0.7 percent or more of their income toward the realization of the MDGs. Episcopal Relief and Development (ERD) is operating successful programs in the developing world that are working in all of the Goal areas. The Church’s Office of Government Relations in Washington, DC—with the help of the thousands of Episcopalians around the country in the Episcopal Public Policy Network (EPPN) —is lobbying the U.S. government to devote more resources to fulfilling the MDGs.

We still have a long way to go, however. As the world stands one-third of the way to the Goals’ completion point, it is clear that a dramatic increase in resources and willpower is necessary for the MDGs to be met.

The Church is uniquely positioned to help lead the momentum of the world in that direction because, simply put, the ministry of reconciliation is nothing less than the core mission of the Church on earth. It is what has been accomplished through the cross of Christ. By engaging in the work of reconciliation, we give glory to God and live into the full truth of who we are called to be as ministers of reconciliation and repair of the world. “If you offer your food to the hungry

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and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,” Isaiah writes, “then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday . . . you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.”

There certainly will be costs and sacrifices associated with achievement of the MDGs, as indeed there frequently are in carrying out the work of reconciliation. But the essential truth of the Christian faith is that this struggle also leads us to true liberation. It allows us to leave behind our false sense of peace and complacency that limit God’s justness and righteousness.

My mind is drawn to a prayer written by St. Francis of Assisi before a crucifix where he once heard the voice of Christ command him to undertake the work of reconciliation in the Church and the world: "Most high, glorious God, enlighten the darkness of my heart and give me, Lord, a right faith, a certain hope, a perfect charity. Give me, Lord, wisdom and discernment, so that I may carry out your true and holy will. Amen."

With the roadmap presented by the Millennium Development Goals, may the Church and the world have the grace to move forward in the work of reconciliation, knowing that God’s power and reconciling love working within us through the risen Christ, “can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.”