

Statement on Poverty for Religious Leader's Consultation on Poverty

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What defined the Early Christian Community was the profound love and care that each member of the Christian community had for the other. It was this love and care that manifested themselves in the willingness of the members to have everything in common. While caring loving is important, it becomes even more important when love and care go beyond the confines of one's denomination or closest associates. Christian care and love require us to respond to the needs of others irrespective of their political, social, denominational and cultural affiliations. Caring love can never be selective.

In order to foster this, the religious sector has an onerous responsibility in ensuring that no member of the community feels less than God created him/her to be. The primary role of the religious community is to make certain that every member of the community does not lose his/her sense of dignity as a person who is created in the image of God. Poverty robs people of their dignity as it reduces them to the status of nobodies. God who reaches out to us in Jesus expects us to reach out to others and help in the transformation of their status by seeing human faces behind poverty. There are various ways of doing this and one of them is for the religious worker to work very closely with the poor in assessing what the needs of the poor are. The greatest need for those who experience grinding poverty is 'survival'. People need to feel the presence of God, not only inside church halls but also in their everyday life. They need to see the hand of God as they are empowered to grapple with matters of survival. The religious sector can assist in the process by identifying areas of cooperation with the poor in their quest for dignity. Essentially this requires exploring new ways of being the Church of God in a world which is characterized by inequitable distribution of the resources. That new way of being the Church needs, among other things, that members of the religious sector should be actively involved not just in prophetic utterances but, even more importantly, in prophetic action. Prophetic action has as its hallmark the rising desire to set free those who are trapped in grinding poverty. Facilitators in this process are agents of transformation and it is the duty of centres of ministerial formation to ensure that seminarians are prepared to respond to the needs of the community with the assurance that in so doing they are engaged in God's work whose Son reached out to us so as to transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of God's never-failing grace.

In essence once the need for transformation becomes the basis of our ministerial formation, we begin to see value, rather than 'straw', in the Epistle of James. Our action, though, finds its point of reference in our divine calling rather than in our need of justification. Prophetic Action takes the focus away from us and places it upon those who are deprived of the basic needs of life.