



Global Community Hour: September 2023:

Social policies and social justice for the eradication of poverty

Introduction:

As usual, we have selected a theme for our prayer and discussion today. This month, our theme is: **social policies and social justice for the eradication of poverty**. While poverty can be described in many different ways, the United Nations defines extreme poverty as “a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. It depends not only on income but also on access to services.” That being said, income is one of the most commonly used measures of poverty on a global level. Over the past three years, the number of individuals living on less than \$3.65 USD-a-day increased by 165 million. The [United Nations Development Programme \(UNDP\)](#) has said that a significant factor contributing to this rise in poverty is the enormous amounts of money that low-income countries are paying in interest for their debts to higher-income countries. For example, on average, low-income countries are likely to spend more than twice as much money satisfying interest payments on foreign loans as they spend on social assistance programmes. The amount they tend to spend on these interest payments is equivalent to 60% of their public education expenditures. In other words, if higher-income nations allowed a “pause” on interest payments for the funds they have loaned to low-income nations, those low-income nations would be able to dedicate significantly greater funds toward programmes that assist those at risk of losing access to their basic needs.

UN General Assembly commemorates the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty each year on October 17th. We have selected the topic of poverty eradication as our theme a month early, however, because it will be the theme of the next “UN Commission on Social Development.” This is a conference held at UN Headquarters each February to address social inequalities, especially as they affect persons with disabilities, people with low income, older persons, and youth. While the conference will not happen until February, we will soon be writing a statement, which will be submitted to the conference on behalf of the JCoR community.

Today will be a first opportunity for some of you to help inform our written statement by sharing your experiences and projects related to poverty. We will also circulate a form in our next JCoR newsletter, which will invite you to say more about how poverty affects the community where you live and serve, how your ministry seeks to alleviate poverty in some way, or what actions you would recommend to your political leaders to alleviate it. If you are interested in offering your input, please watch for the newsletter and be sure to submit your response!

Before we get to sharing on this topic, let us begin, as we always do, by uniting ourselves in prayer...

Prayer:

Reader: We have, for most of human history, imagined that the solution to poverty was growth:

Bigger machines, bigger crop yields, bigger business, bigger income, bigger homes.

Instead, as we heard from Pope Francis that “The exploitation of the planet has already exceeded acceptable limits and we still have not solved the problem of poverty.”

We have seen that infinite economic growth as a pathway out of poverty is a myth.

We have seen that a higher GDP (Gross Domestic Product) does not translate to the satisfaction of basic needs of all.

Instead, we have seen poverty persist alongside rising GDPs, producing growth of a different kind:

Bigger armies, bigger weapons, bigger walls, bigger waste, bigger gaps between the wealthiest and poorest among us.

Reader: God, help us to seek growth in attention more than we seek growth in technological convenience...

Help us to recall the plenty of Eden, of your creation, which we inherited from the countless beautiful species that came before us.

Help us to recognize that we live in a condition of abundance, and that poverty is a failure to adequately distribute the overflowing wealth You provide.

Help us to notice the dignity and potential of those who lack adequate shelter, nutrition, healthcare, and opportunity. They are present in every nation on earth, regardless of the nation’s GDP.

Help us to identify our own urges to seek comfort in the consumption of goods.

Help us to discover the greater comfort that lies within our capacity to conserve and regenerate natural wealth instead.

Response of all: God, help us to grow in attention.

Reader: God, help us to seek growth in gratitude more than we seek growth in crop yields...

Help us to approach the substance and lifeforms of this planet with reverence.

Help us to learn from our indigenous sisters and brothers how to appreciate the dignity of all life by harvesting no more than we need to nourish our bodies and by letting no food go to waste.

Inspire us to speak words of thanks, not only before meals, but each time we turn on a light or a water tap, each time we begin a journey in a vehicle that will burn fossil fuels.

Help us to savor life’s purest blessings enough to live simply with great joy.

Response of all: God, help us to grow in gratitude.

Reader: God, help us to seek growth in solidarity more than we seek growth in annual revenue...

Deepen our sense that we are parts of one body, so that the well-being of one can be achieved only through the well-being of all.

Help us to more consistently seek out opportunities to distribute whatever form of wealth we possess, whether it is our resources, our time, our talents, or the wisdom of our own experience.

Help us to receive—with grace and reverence—the gifts of resources, time, talent, and wisdom that may be offered to us by our sisters and brothers from every background.

Response of all: God, help us to grow in solidarity.

Reader: God, help us to seek growth in commitment more than we seek growth in the size of our homes or bank accounts.

Strengthen our commitment to educating our young people and our political leaders about the precious natural wealth of the world and helping them to understand that humanity is part of nature's economy.

Strengthen our resolve to withdraw financial investments and avoid purchases from big corporations that disregard human rights or our environmental crisis.

Strengthen our commitment to promote social policies that discourage excessive accumulation of money by individuals and allocate government funding for programmes that facilitate greater access to water, food, shelter, and healthcare for all people.

Strengthen our insistence on debt forgiveness among nations to unburden low-income nations from the crushing weight of interest payments and free them to provide stronger support services to those in their population who are at risk of extreme poverty.

Response of all: God, help us to grow in commitment.

Reader: In what other aspects do we need to grow in order to eradicate poverty from our world? You are invited to respond in a word or two by speaking aloud or typing in the chat box.

[Participants speak aloud; Reader reads any responses typed into chat box]

Reader: God, in all these aspects of life and governance, guide our growth so that we may eradicate poverty from our hearts, our nations, and our global community.

Amen.