



Statement Summaries and Discussion Questions

I. Interfaith Theological Statement: Our Commitment as Faithful Citizens to Reducing Child Poverty in Wisconsin

The persistence of poverty is a moral crisis that calls us to action. Our commitment to reducing poverty is based on our religious teachings that: (1) All people are created in God's image; (2) People are created for life in community – relationships of mutual care, respect, and responsibility; (3) God's gifts are abundant and are to be enjoyed by all; (4) We are to share God's special concern for the vulnerable and marginalized.

Our responsibility to provide assistance to our neighbors is supported by quotations from scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam:

If there is among you anyone in need...do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor. You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be. – Deuteronomy 15:7-8

[Jesus] unrolled the scroll [of the prophet Isaiah] and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." – Luke 4:17b-19

It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces Towards east or West; but it is righteousness . . . to spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer, and practice regular charity; to fulfil the contracts which ye have made . . . Such are the people of truth, the God-fearing. – Quran 2:177

When we turn away from the needs of our community, God calls us to repentance – as individuals and as a community. At the same time, God draws us forward with visions of a community of dignity, justice and well-being for all, a world in which every child has a bright and promising future.

People of many faiths and philosophies share the goal of reducing poverty, and can work together to find solutions. As people of faith we commit ourselves to being part of the solution, in partnership with all persons of good will.

Questions for Discussion

1. * What does it mean to you to respect someone as being made in God's image, especially someone from a different racial or ethnic group or who may be less affluent than yourself?
2. What does it mean to you, "we are created for life in community"?
3. * What do you think the scriptural passages quoted tell us about our responsibility to address poverty in our time and place?
4. * If God's gifts are sufficient for everyone's needs, why are there some communities that lack the resources they need to survive? Why do some members of your community lack resources?
5. *Have someone read Isaiah 58:6-12 aloud.* What feelings, ideas, or images does this passage evoke? What do you picture in your mind as a "community of dignity, justice and well-being for all, a world in which every child has a bright and promising future"?
6. In light of this discussion, do you think Wisconsin should set an explicit goal to cut the child poverty rate by half in 10 years, while also cutting racial disparities in child poverty in half?

II. Public Policy Statement: End Child Poverty Campaign: Poverty Reduction Goal

The people of Wisconsin need to set a goal of cutting childhood poverty in half in the next ten years. To guarantee greater equity, we also need to cut racial disparities in childhood poverty in half. These goals need to be accompanied by a commitment to evidence-based evaluation of progress.

Conclusions from the conversations:

- Poverty is mainly the result of social and economic factors, not individual moral failings.
- We have a responsibility to change social and economic conditions as well as to help individuals.
- Effective solutions will require finding common ground
- This work must be done in relationship between those experiencing racial disparities and poverty and those living with abundance.

While there is broad agreement that government has a role, there is much disagreement about particular policies. We should “flip the script.” Instead of supporting policies based on our political preferences, we should hold ourselves and our elected leaders accountable to outcomes.

Four main strategies:

- Set child poverty reduction goals, racial equity goals, and timelines
- Develop accountability mechanisms: Track and evaluate to see what is working and what needs to change
- Implement multi-sector, evidence based strategies: Including employment, income, education, and strengthening families
- Measure progress and adjust strategies as necessary.

First step: a faith-led effort to inspire policymakers, opinion leaders and stakeholders to publicly commit to the goal.

Discussion Questions

1. * What do you think persons who have not experienced poverty can and should learn from those who have? What can be done to ensure that the voices of persons in poverty can be heard when actions or programs to address poverty are discussed?
2. * How would “flipping the script” – evaluating policies by whether they achieve measurable progress toward a specific goal, rather than by whether they fit a particular political party’s platform or just “sound good” -- make a difference in the way we try to solve a major public problem like poverty?
3. * What is your faith community, state and local government, or other community organizations doing to address child poverty in your area?
4. Do you see public policy advocacy – speaking to lawmakers and community leaders about the need cut in half child poverty – as a role for you as a person of faith? As a role for your faith community? Why or why not?
5. What can your congregation do to help lead conversations among your members or in your community about solutions to poverty? What needs to be done to ensure that those conversations are constructive, inclusive, and civil?