



THE ANTI-POVERTY SOLDIER

By Clarence Hightower, Ph.D.



Community Action

Our moral imperative

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...Whatever thoughts we have about God, who he is, or even if God exists, most would agree that God has a special place for the poor. The poor are where God lives. God is in the slums, in the cardboard boxes where the poor play house. God is where the opportunity is lost and lives are shattered. God is with the mother who has infected her child with a virus that will take both their lives. God is under the rubble in the cries we hear during wartime. God my friends is with the poor. And he is with us, if we are with them.

- Bono

This column marks the 100th edition of *The Anti-Poverty Soldier*, the first of which was published in April of 2014. In reflecting back on some of what has been written to this point, I wish to use this installment to revisit one of the more common themes that has pervaded earlier columns; society's civil and moral responsibilities in addressing the issue of poverty.

The quote listed above, an excerpt from a speech delivered by U2's Bono at the 2007 NAACP Image Awards, has faithfully resided in my mind since I first heard it nearly ten years ago. Now, I must make a qualifying statement before I proceed. While I have spent thirty-five years as a nonprofit executive in the Twin Cities, I also serve as a Baptist minister. And, in my dual roles, there is a particular sentence from this speech that expressly resonates with me. That sentence is, "And he [God] is with us, if we are with them."

To be clear, my intent in this column is not to jump into the pulpit and preach. I am appreciative of the fact that we are of many spiritual beliefs, customs, and thoughts, including those whose faith does not rest in religion at all. With that in mind, I would like to shape this discussion around another prominent "quote" or "thought" which is in the same spirit as the one above.

This particular notion has gone through a multitude of iterations and goes back at least more than 2,400 years to Aristotle. And, in more modern times, it has been attributed to the likes of Lord John Acton, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Pope John Paul II, former President Jimmy Carter, and even Minnesota's own Hubert H. Humphrey. In paraphrasing this lofty thought from all its historical recapitulations, it essentially states that "The true measure of a society can best be found in how it treats its most vulnerable citizens."

So, whether or not our thoughts on poverty and the welfare of all our fellow citizens are influenced by our personal faith, a sense of ethics, civic responsibility, or other moral imperatives, I believe that we must ask ourselves a question that has been posed many times before, "Will history judge us on how we treat the poor in our time?"

If the answer is yes, which I believe it to be, what will we do to as a society to improve the quality of life for the poor in our midst? Of course, there are programs, organizations, and committed individuals that are already working to alleviate poverty. Here at Community Action Partnership of

Ramsey & Washington Counties our role is to serve low-income residents, educate the broader community about critical issues, and transform systems that create barriers for individuals and families that are working to escape poverty.

And yet, there is still so much more to be done. There are far too many among us that are still subject to the pain and injustice of poverty. I recognize that there are those among us that don't believe that lifting others out of poverty is their responsibility. However, for those of us that heed this call, regardless of its inspiration, I believe that we must amplify our voices, revitalize our lot, and expand our efforts to help people overcome poverty.

As Muhammad Yunus, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate in economics writes, "Poverty is an artificial, external imposition on a human being; it is not innate in a human being. And since it is external, it can be removed. It is just a question of doing it."

Do we have the will?

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