

Understanding Poverty

Understanding poverty means acknowledging that it transcends borders, cultures, and communities. It does not discriminate. It touches every race and ethnicity and weaves a narrative whose nuances are often lost on the general public. The Rev. William Barber and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove underscored this universal reach of poverty in [a recent episode of *For the Life of the World*](#), produced by the Yale Center for Faith and Culture, where they confronted me with stark numbers. There are 135 million poor and low-wage working people in America. Of those experiencing poverty, 66 million are white and 26 million poor are Black. Yet how often do we associate poverty as an issue of color? The narrative landscape of America is riddled with myths about poverty, race, and class.



The Christian Ethic

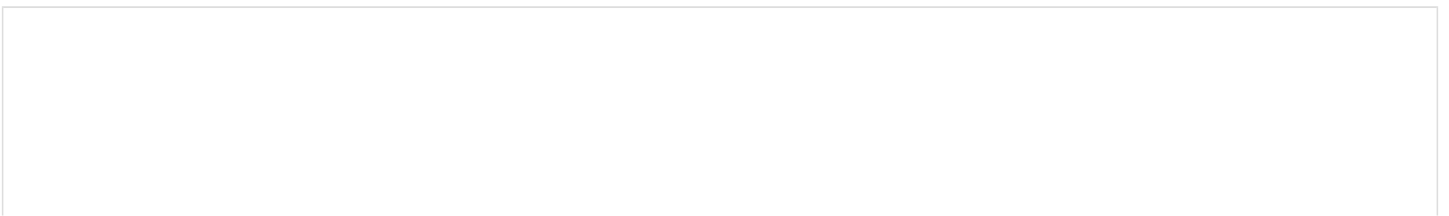
Scripture reminds us of the call to care for people living in poverty and at the margins. In His ministry, Jesus consistently reached out to those on the fringes—those who society often overlooked or despised. He identified with people in need, stating, “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40). This call to solidarity is not just a spiritual ideal. It is also a practical mandate to see the face of Christ in every person we encounter, regardless of their socioeconomic status.

My parish has been reflecting on the idea that Christianity isn’t about “being a good person.” Christianity doesn’t have a generic ethic of being nice or polite. Instead, it has a Christo-centric social imagination. And don’t take my word for it, read for yourself in our Book of Common Prayer. Our Baptismal Covenant asks us: “Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?” (305). Our tradition gives us a spiritual vision to care for the face of Christ, who is in the face of our neighbors—especially our poor neighbors.

Poverty and Christ Unite Us

The Christian ethic reminds us that we share far more with our neighbors than we are willing to admit. Poverty strips away the superficial distinctions that often divide us, revealing our shared vulnerability. It is a stark reminder that no one is immune to hardship. Societal systems can fail anyone, regardless of race or ethnicity. In the U.S., welfare and support systems are not just issues for one community. These systems are deeply intertwined with the lives of white, black, and brown families alike. Understanding poverty means recognizing that the face of poverty is diverse.

And just as humanity shares the common plight of poverty, [we also share the common vocation to serve Christ in each other](#). In a political landscape that defaults to capitalizing on differences, our faith reminds us that poverty and Christ are two tokens that unite us in our shared humanity.





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