

REACHING THE URBAN POOR

Agenda Guidelines for Study Groups

For the CONSULTATION ON WORLD EVANGELIZATION, THAILAND, 1980

Introduction The guidelines below may assist you and your study group to collect and share information and responses. But please deal with the real situation in which you have been placed by God. Your report will assist in the final preparation of a Working Paper for COWE, beyond which we are all praying that we may yet see the Spirit of God creating authentic expressions of His people among the urban poor.

Urban Poor In your context who are the poor? In what sense are they poor? Why are they poor? What is their place in your wider society? Who benefits from their being poor? In what areas do the poor have power? In what conflicts of values or interests are they caught up? What distinctive values, beliefs, prejudices, customs &c do they have? What of their housing? their amenities? health and hygiene? life expectancy? literacy? schooling? employment? family life? leadership? relations with those 'in authority'? How are they served by legal, economic and political institutions? Is there social mobility? loss of family ties? marital breakdown? delinquency? infant mortality? malnutrition and hunger? mental illness? What is the population density? Is it multi-racial? Are there minority groups? How do youth and age relate? What strengths can you identify? Which skills and attitudes do you affirm? How is joy expressed? Are there living symbols or rituals? What are the areas of wonder and awe? Do you see areas of exploitation? of squalor? of degradation? of humiliation? of despair? of hope? of resilience? What to them is phoney? What has their respect? What wrong assumptions are made by well-meaning 'outsiders'?

The Gospel and the Urban Poor Where the urban poor have NOT been grasped by the gospel, why is this? What 'gospel' have they seen or heard and rejected? Has it been the gospel of Jesus and the early messianic community or 'another'? How have they experienced or perceived the people of God? Has the institutional church in your area buttressed a status quo that has been oppressing the poor? Has the gospel been distorted by association? Is „Jesus "one of them" (ie the powerful) rather than "one of us"? Have we presented the gospel, bound in a culture with which the poor could not identify? Has their own culture been demeaned and never been seen as redeemed by Christ?

Identify the 'blocks' to the gospel among the urban poor, whether "theological, historical, cultural, political, ecclesiastical, methodological or personal."

Where the urban poor HAVE been grasped by the gospel, why is this? What factors were the 'bridge'? Which models for being the people of God are to be found? Which are viable and which non-viable? What attracts folk to any grouping (Christian, sectarian or secular) which is strong? Is the leadership from the urban poor? In which areas have Christians among the poor retained working class cultures? Where they have changed, is it in response to the gospel or to the dominant culture among other Christians; Do new Christians find it difficult to remain as Christians? Is this because of an alienating culture-change demanded by others? Are there church structures that are authentic to the neighbourhood? Are they caring communities where lives are being healed Why is this happening? How do they see their role in relation to neighbourhood and society? How do they express the missionary? the prophetic? the priestly? the serving dimensions of being God's people? Do they emphasize the work of the Holy Spirit? How do they see JESUS? How the cross and resurrection of the Messiah? Which aspects of the total gospel are most dear to them? By which approaches are they attracted to the gospel?

Identify the bridges whether theological, historical, cultural, political, ecclesiastical, methodological or personal".

Strategies in Reaching the Urban Poor

Identify where any of the following are part of mission among the urban poor in your region; add others not listed. Be sure to include the work of non-evangelicals. Describe and evaluate them in terms of how they enable the poor to see Jesus, understand the gospel, grasp the discipleship into which the gospel would call them, and respond in faith to Christ. Is authentic friendship shared and Jesus named by it and within it?

- (a) residential - opting to live as one of the poor making their context our own, sharing their lives and neighbourhoods, living in interdependence with them

- (b) service - supporting in the finding of homes, food, medical treatment, jobs, legal advice, marital & family counselling, language skills etc.
- (c) solidarity - standing alongside in the struggle for justice, against racism, homelessness, poverty, wrongful imprisonment, exploitation etc.
- (d) awareness - enabling an understanding of the needs of the neighbourhood and the reasons for its plight; assisting in finding needed resources to mobilize for change; training in basic skills and community development encouraging self respect and confidence
- (e) visitation - in homes, hospitals, prisons, shelters etc.
- (f) hospitality - keeping open homes, entertaining, baby-sitting etc.
- (g) festivity - creating street festivals, family celebrations, song etc.
- (h) arts - through music, song, dance, video film, local radio, street theatre, neighbourhood art, creativity etc.
- (i) cross-cultural activity - bringing together different ethnic groups, youth & age etc.
- (j) involvement - in running necessary amenities such as laundrettes, eating houses, youth clubs, crises centres etc.
- (k) cell groups - 'home groups, base groups, cells in factories, groups in prisons etc. (for friendship, celebration, prayer, Bible study, action planning &c).
- (l) discipling - creating new churches, 'lay' education, training in leadership, scripture memorization etc.
- (m) residential communities - households, networks of households, and varying communities sharing lives, possessions and commitment to each other and the neighbourhood
- (n) renewal - bringing new vision, vitality and direction to tired organizations and structures

Biblical Insights for Reaching the Urban Poor

What can we know of God's attitude to the poor? Does the Bible help us to identify why the poor are poor? In what way can the prophetic tradition help us now? What is the importance, for our task, of the incarnation? What is the gospel for the poor? Is the "making of disciples" more than the "making of converts"?

Does the Bible demand a continuing missionary presence till a strong indigenous Christian peoplehood has been formed? How did the gospel take hold of the poor in the early church? What message to the rich Christian does the Bible have? Has it bearing on mission to the urban poor? Would you agree that the only God the Bible speaks of as providing salvation for the wealthy is Himself in solidarity with the poor and can be served only from that vantage point? What kind of church does God require in our day?

What shapes might new congregations take if local cultures are to be honoured and claimed for Christ? Can you identify what would have to be rejected in the culture of the poor in your area? Are there approaches/methods which would seem to the poor to contradict the gospel message? Are there any approaches/methods by which the gospel might be more clearly seen, understood, experienced?

Summary

(a) Describe the urban poor. (b) Identify what has helped or hindered evangelism among the poor, assessing the causes of resistance or receptivity to the gospel. (c) Evaluate strategies in the light of your other findings. (d) Determine what biblical insights we have been given. (e) List the areas where you see the need of help and the nature of the help you would like. (f) Which of your own findings or resources would you commend to others? (g) What are the next steps if the urban poor are to be reached with the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ?

Jim Punton
International Co-ordinator