

an inspecting tour and learn what is needed and how it can be best supplied.”¹⁷

Secondly, our attitude is sometimes more important than our physical aid: “God calls not only for your benevolence but for your cheerful countenance, your hopeful words, the grasp of your hand.

As you visit the Lord’s afflicted ones you will find some from whom hope has departed; bring back the sunshine to them.”¹⁸

Thirdly, Ellen White encourages our churches particularly in the country to give opportunity to the needy to work in nature and

what we now call community gardens. “Within the vast boundaries of nature ... there are resources sufficient to provide them with food.... Teach them how to use the implements of agriculture, how to cultivate various crops, how to plant and care for orchards.”¹⁹



On the front lines of the war on poverty there is obviously much to be done, both by government agencies and local churches. Let’s take Ellen White’s advice along with current practical applications and accomplish more in the next decade.

“The great thing about serving the poor is that there is no competition.” —Eugene Rivers

References:

- ¹Talking Points, “The War on Poverty: Success or Failure?” *The Week*, January 24, 2014, p.14.
- ²Robert J. Samuelson, “Defining Poverty Up,” *Newsweek*, June 7, 2010, p. 23.
- ³Talking Points, “The War on Poverty: Success or Failure?” *The Week*, January 24, 2014, p.14.
- ⁴*Testimonies*, Vol. 9, pp. 12-13.
- ⁵*Manuscript* 103, 1906.
- ⁶*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 534-536.
- ⁷*Testimonies*, Vol. 6, pp. 269-271.
- ⁸*Testimonies*, Vol.1, pp. 272-274.
- ⁹*Testimonies*, Vol.1, pp. 227-228.
- ¹⁰*Testimonies*, Vol.1, pp. 227-228.
- ¹¹*Testimonies*, Vol.1 pp. 272-274.
- ¹²*Testimonies*, Vol.1, pp. 272-274.
- ¹²*Adventist Home*, p. 369.
- ¹⁴*Ministry of Healing*, pp. 183-188.
- ¹⁵*Testimonies*, Vol.1, pp. 272-274.
- ¹⁶*Testimonies*, Vol. 5, p. 151.
- ¹⁷*Testimonies*, Vol.1, pp. 272-274.
- ¹⁸*Testimonies*, Vol.1, pp. 276-277.
- ¹⁹*Testimonies*, Vol.6, pp. 188-189.



Distributed by: Central California Conference Stewardship Ministries
Interim Director: Janet Biloff **Produced by:** Pacific Union Conference Stewardship Department
Director: Gordon Botting **Design/Assistant Editor:** Maricel Felarca

The Stewpot

A potpourri of practical ideas to help you become a better steward.

March 2014
Volume 19, Issue 3

MINISTERING TO THE POOR

By Gordon Botting, DrPH, CHES, CFC

Five decades ago, President Lyndon Johnson promised an unconditional *War on Poverty* program in the United States. In the fifty years that have passed the federal government has spent a staggering \$16 trillion on hundreds of antipoverty programs. For example, two years ago government agencies at all three levels—local, state, and federal—pitched nearly \$1 trillion at this predicament. This amounts to an average of over \$20,000 for every impoverished man, woman, and child in America. However, according to the latest statistics 15 percent of Americans are still destitute, a mere 4 percent less than when President Johnson made his proclamation in 1964.¹



To be fair, the living standards of the needy have vastly improved. Thanks in part to a variety of government benefits, the typical American living in poverty has a home that is larger, better, and furnished with all the needed amenities than a typical home in other parts of the world. During the last decade over 90 percent have obtained microwaves, 80 percent have air-conditioning, and virtually all have access to cable TV and free cell phones.²

The fundamental goal of President Johnson’s program was to give the poor “opportunity, not doles” and to lift them to the

level of the average middle class, but millions of able-bodied, non-elderly Americans have become wholly dependent on public assistance. Robert Rector astutely stated, “By that standard, the war on poverty has been a catastrophe.”³ Over a hundred years ago, Ellen White stated the cause of this present state of our society—“Those who hold the reins of government are not able to solve the problem of moral corruption, **poverty, pauperism,** and increasing crime.”⁴

At this fiftieth year anniversary it would seem appropriate to ask: did Ellen White say anything

Stewardship is a total lifestyle. It involves our health, time, talents, environment, relationships, *spirituality*, and finances.

about poverty?

The Poor are Christ's Chief Concern

She says in numerous places in her writing, "Christ's chief work was in the preaching of the gospel to the poor... Christ came to this earth to walk and work among the poor and suffering.



They received the greatest share of His attention. And today, in the person of His children, He visits the poor and needy, relieving woe and alleviating suffering."⁵

Did Ellen White Propose the Elimination of Poverty?

On this subject she wrote: "There are many who urge with great enthusiasm that all men should have an equal share in the temporal blessings of God. But this was not the purpose of the Creator. A diversity of condition is one means by which God designs to prove and develop character. Yet He intends that those who have worldly possessions shall regard themselves merely as stewards of His goods, as entrusted with means to be employed for the benefit of the suffering and the needy."⁶ Further, Ellen White goes on to say that there are two classes of those in need. "There are two classes of poor.... Those who ruin themselves by their own course of action and

continue in their transgression, and those who for the Truth's sake have been brought into straitened circumstances."⁷

There are Two Categories of Poor

The reason there are two categories of those who are impoverished is: Many are poor from their own lack of diligence and

economy; they know not how to use means aright. If they should be helped, it would hurt them. Some will always be poor. If they should have the very best advantages, their cases would not be helped... Some know nothing of denying self and economizing to keep out of debt and to get a little ahead for a time of need. Their whole course in their family is marked with their loose, slack habits."⁸ Ellen White continues: "There are those who when helped will continue to make themselves special objects of need. They will be dependent as long as they see anything on which to depend. By giving undue time and attention to these we may encourage idleness, helplessness, extravagance, and intemperance."⁹

The proverb, "the world owes me a living," has in it the essence of falsehood, fraud, and robbery. The world owes no man a living who is able to work and gain a

living for himself... We should endeavor to provide them with work, and if necessary, teach them how to work."¹⁰ She advises church members to distinguish those who would use their kindness to manipulate them: "When such embrace the message they feel that they are entitled to assistance from their more wealthy brethren; and if their expectations are not met, they complain of the church and accuse them of not living out their faith. ... Must the cause of God be sapped, and the treasury in different places exhausted to take care of these large families of poor? No."¹¹ Finally, she calls on the church to exercise wisdom in helping: "Methods of helping the needy should be carefully and prayerfully considered.... In trying to help the needy, we should be careful to give them the right kind of help."¹²

Who Should Be Aiding Those in Poverty?

Ellen White affirms: "If we have prosperity in our secular business, it is because God blesses us. A part of this income is to be devoted to the poor, and a large portion to be applied to the cause of God."¹³ Another statement on who should help reminds us of a number of wealthy business people who have taken up the challenge to assist poor children



with their schooling. "There are large-hearted men and women who are anxiously considering the condition of the poor and what means can be found for their relief."¹⁴

More Than Money Is Needed

When it comes to lending a hand to the underprivileged, she seems to be very strong in reminding us that money alone is not sufficient. "There are some who give indiscriminately to everyone who solicits their aid. In this they error. Some think that if they give money to this work, it is all they are required to do, but this is an error. Donations of money cannot take the place of personal ministry.... We should not give countenance to indolence or encourage habits of self-gratification by affording means for indulgence. Real charity helps men to help themselves."¹⁵

The Church Is Responsible For the Poor

However, Ellen White is very clear that it is our responsibility to work with and for those less fortunate: "The work of gathering in the needy, the oppressed, the suffering, the destitute, is the very work which every church that believes the truth for this time should long since have been doing."¹⁶ Interestingly, she reminds the church to first "go on